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A GIRL OF TO-DAY

By Elizabeth Duer

CHAPTER I.

THERE seems to be an especial training necessary for every avocation in life with the exception of legislation and fatherhood; but for these, which underlie all good government, no further wit is required than the ready-made article furnished by nature.

Frederick Vyner, a widower of fifty—rich, successful, charming—was finally brought face to face with the fact that he had failed to develop in his daughter, Priscilla, those yielding graces so beautifying to the feminine character. Hence the tears of this truthful narrative.

The winter sunshine blazed through the windows of the little boudoir, the freshly lit fire crackled on the hearth, and the easy-chairs, their portly figures buttoned into frocks of pink cretonne, were set at an angle that seemed to invite occupancy. Over the mantelpiece hung a mirror in a frame of delicate leaves supported by two flying Cupids, and on the wall opposite was a portrait—a half length—of a beautiful woman. A writing table, a *chaise-longue* with pink Italian blankets and silk cushions, and a few enameled chairs completed the furniture.

The clock on the mantelpiece pointed to eleven, and punctual to its chiming the door from the adjoining bedroom opened and a little figure shuffled in. I say "shuffled" advisedly, for the skirts of her pink dressing gown were long enough to trip her if she had assumed a

free step, and her bare feet were thrust into the slippers without backs that the French call *mules*. Her maid followed with two more pillows—little ones of delicate embroidery and valenciennes, with the name "Priscilla" half hidden in a wreath of rosebuds—and proceeded to make her young lady comfortable.

The couch was wheeled a little closer to the fire, the lady nested among the pillows and blankets, and a small table was set ready for her breakfast tray. A tap at the door announced its arrival.

To vast feminine self-indulgence Priscilla added a few masculine habits of mind derived from a paternal bringing up, of which absolute punctuality was the most conspicuous.

The maid received the tray from the footman, and with it a message to the effect that Mr. Vyner wished to see Miss Vyner as soon as she was awake, and would come to her room.

"Say I am awake—I am ready now," the girl called, pleasantly.

Evidently an interview with her father had only pleasant anticipations. They had been friends and companions, these two—the middle-aged, handsome father, and the girl whose motherless youth had been his absorbing care.

"Hello, dad!" she said, as a moment later he came in and stood with his back to the fire, looking at the scene of lazy luxury. "Have some breakfast?" she added.

"What devilish trash you women eat!" he said, laughing; "a grape fruit, a French roll, a cup of chocolate. Why can't you eat your porridge, and a chop or some eggs, and drink coffee, like the rest of humanity?"

"Too much dissipation; languid appetite; no tone!" Priscilla answered, with a shrug. "I danced last night till four. Ah! I know what you are going to say—that you don't approve of two young women being out so late, even if one is married, but I can tell you Mrs. Nugent is very careful; she came inside the front door with me, and wouldn't leave till she had handed me over to Julie. Observe my favors, if you please," and she pointed to a chaotic mass of ribbons and artificial flowers, and five tiny gilt cages with live canary birds.

Her father only glanced at the array, while an anxious expression came over his face.

"Prissy," he said, "I don't like the way things are going. We are dining at different houses almost every night, and you are asked to dances where I am not included, and chaperoned by flighty matrons like Mrs. Nugent. Worst of all, you are surrounded by a set of men I entirely disapprove. It is bad enough to have you seen with them at the various entertainments, but when it comes to your receiving any man you please at home in my absence it is time to think about a kind of chaperonage which I am not able to give you."

Priscilla's cheeks flamed.

"Do you mean that you object to my receiving my friends in the afternoon in my own drawing-room?" she asked.

He nodded.

"I know who has been putting these ideas into your head—it is Mrs. Rawlston, and I consider it an unjustifiable interference on her part; particularly as she doesn't object to a good strong flirtation on her own account with a certain handsome person I know!"

The edge of the impertinence was taken from her speech by a caressing smile. In her heart she thought that the blandishments of the widow were quite thrown away upon her father. But the smile met with no response.

"I am sorry," he said, gravely, "that you so mistake the kindest friend we both have, and I might remark that a lady of Mrs. Rawlston's age is not to be judged by the standards of a girl of

twenty—but let that pass! I came here to tell you that I have taken the only and best measure to protect us from your own inexperience. I have asked Mrs. Rawlston to marry me."

If the polar bear whose skin served as hearth rug had got up and enfolded her in an embrace of death, Prissy could not have been more shocked and frightened. She leaned forward, grasping the arm of the sofa, her face pale to the lips, her eyes fixed and stony, and then suddenly the eyes raised themselves to her mother's picture, and she burst into floods of tears.

"I thought you cared," she sobbed, "for *her* and for me. How dare you spoil my life like this! How dare you take any one's happiness and break it to bits in your hands, and then"—here her voice grew steady and scornful—"then pretend you are doing it for my good!"

The unfortunate Vyner came to the side of the sofa, and stroked Prissy's ruffled head, which she pettishly withdrew from his touch while she continued her tirade with unabated wrath.

"I had supposed we were companions," she said, reproachfully. "I fancied I had almost taken *her* place in your heart"—waving to the picture—"and to think of your planning such treachery to *her*, and to me! Oh, papa! Why, there were times when I have thought of giving up saying 'papa,' and just calling you 'Fred' out of pure friendship. Oh! I wish you hadn't, I wish you hadn't!" she moaned.

Poor Vyner began to wish so too. He sincerely liked the lady he had just invited to share his life, but Priscilla represented to him the romance of his youth. If he had been alone with his own soul and the portrait of his wife, he would have knelt before it, and said:

"My dear love, you couldn't manage her at ten, how can you expect me to manage her at twenty?" but he had to deal with the living Priscilla, so he proceeded to carry the war into her quarters.

"Do you think it is well-behaved to pass from one flirtation to another?" he asked. "How many lovers have you had this winter, Prissy?"

She shook her head and cried, and he continued:

"Has a single one had the manliness to come to me before making you conspicuous by his attentions? Not a week passes without your name being coupled with that of some fortune-hunting fool! Because I am rich and you are an only child you are the prey of every fashionable loafer who would rather marry you than work for his living. It is bad enough with Americans, but when it comes to good-for-nothing Englishmen——"

Here Prissy became sarcastic.

"Then it's as a buffer against Lord Bassford that you are setting up a domesticated duenna."

"Partly," he answered, frankly, "and partly to gain for myself a companion of mature views. The wear and tear of our relations to each other is getting beyond me, I confess. You are by jerks a child of five, a woman with real affections, a sophisticated worldling, a full-fledged simpleton. Mrs. Rawlston's character is plain to read. She is high-minded, unselfish, well-bred. Heaven send she may teach you to value in yourself what is best."

"Mrs. Rawlston is about *that wide*," said Prissy, marking half an inch on her pretty finger, "and conventionality means more to her than life itself. As for that precious son of hers—my new brother—he is a perfect bruin—a cinnamon bear, with his red head and brown skin—I only hope he may be kept chained and muzzled in his own house."

Mr. Vyner turned on his heel.

"You are becoming a trifle coarse, my little girl," he said. "Mr. Rawlston is not likely to desire your company; he leads too busy a life. I can forgive some natural unhappiness on your part at hearing such news as mine, but I fancy when you come to think the matter over you will be sorry for much you have said."

He kissed her tear-stained cheeks and left her.

No matter what our griefs, the routine of life goes on with prosaic sameness. At lunch Priscilla met her father and talked before the servants of a play she

was rehearsing at Mrs. Carter's, and when, side by side, they left the room, the few sentences they exchanged were in seeming kindness.

"As a matter of civility I must ask you to go to see Mrs. Rawlston this afternoon," he said, and she answered:

"I had intended doing so."

At three o'clock the smallest of victorias was waiting before the door with Prissy's own big bay, her own old coachman who had been her mother's before her, and a diminutive groom standing at the steps whose entire person was obliterated by the fur carriage robe he held over his arm.

Miss Vyner came out of the house with her head well in the air and her usual perfection of detail in every article of her toilet; but she couldn't deceive old Plummer; he had known every expression of her face from the time she had been held in a saddle at two years old, till now, when advanced to young ladyhood, he had become her own man, and he had his suspicions of what was wrong—he knew where the master went courting! Alack! these suspicions were too promptly confirmed by the order communicated by Billy Jenkins when, after settling his lady, he climbed beside Plummer and smoothed his long coat tails to make a neat posterior appearance on the box.

"We'll be *driv* to 7 East Blank Street," said Billy, and added, *sotto voce*: "Charles do say as Mr. Vyner's hansom is standin' there about half the time."

Plummer turned an eye, but not his head.

"You give your horders without none of your comments, young man, or there'll be a vacancy on this box and it won't be me."

It was with a sinking heart that Priscilla passed into Mrs. Rawlston's familiar drawing-room. She had always known the bride-elect—indeed, in a formal way was intimate with her, but it was a family inheritance rather than a spontaneous selection—and resolved itself into a few ceremonious invitations on both sides during the season and some mild jokes with her father about

always asking Mrs. Rawlston to assist him whenever he found himself the only older person among Prissy's friends.

She had waited five minutes when a servant asked her to follow him upstairs to the library. She was to be received into the bosom of the family, she concluded, scornfully—perhaps the library was bruin's particular lair.

The thought had hardly crossed her mind when from the depths of a great armchair she saw a cinnamon head rear itself, and Philip Rawlston came forward with a cordiality of greeting that had no trace of the bear.

"Now, this is kind of you," he said, "to accept a trying situation in a friendly spirit! I need hardly say how much my mother will appreciate your coming to her."

"Do I look as if I had come of my own volition?" she asked, crossly.

He seemed only amused by her pettish outburst, for his long face puckered itself into wrinkles about the eyes and the lips parted to show a set of handsome teeth—the only really handsome thing nature had bestowed upon him except a well-knit figure.

"Then let me compliment you upon your philosophy," he returned; "to accept the inevitable without making a fuss shows even a higher order of intelligence."

Priscilla could have stamped with vexation.

"I have made all the fuss I could," she answered, flushing hotly. "I hate it! Do you know what it means to me? From freedom I have got to go back to leading strings—from equal companionship to being an unwelcome third—from being encouraged to think and talk of my dead mother her name will henceforth be an offense in the house!"

The young man came close to her and spoke in a low tone.

"Don't let my mother hear you," he begged. "She feels so kindly, and your attitude must antagonize her. Indeed, you take a morbid view of the outcome. If you will only let her be your friend, believe me you will find half these objections melt away."

"It is very well for you to talk," she

retorted. "You will gain a freer foot than ever, whereas I——" and the door opened upon the incomplete sentence and Mrs. Rawlston came forward with outstretched hands.

Her face expressed a kind of Madonna-like sweetness, her figure was superb, her air distinguished.

"Priscilla," she said, "I was afraid you would find it hard to forgive me. May I hope this means that you will receive me kindly?"

Philip stood behind his mother with his hand on her shoulders; his eyes were fixed on Priscilla in a way that made her writhe—there was a compelling power in them which she felt while she resented.

"I have come, Mrs. Rawlston," she said, "chiefly because it seemed the only decent thing to do. I hope you and papa will be happy—that you will succeed in satisfying his need of a companion better than I have done"—here her voice broke—"and that at the end of ten years you won't be left to eat your heart in silence."

"That can hardly happen, as I do not over-estimate his affection for me, Priscilla, but I clearly see that you underestimate his love for you. Can't we make common cause of his happiness and be friends?"

The voice had the suggestion of an appeal, and somehow it made a lump come in Prissy's throat.

"I think," she said, looking anxiously at the door, "that I may be going to cry, and I should like to go—after all, there is nothing to be said."

Mrs. Rawlston stepped aside, and the cinnamon bear followed her downstairs.

"You didn't do as badly as I feared," he whispered, too low for the servant at the door to hear, "but there is room for improvement."

"I didn't ask your opinion, at any rate," said the girl, almost stamping as she flung out of the house.

"Cub, bear, beast!" she said aloud as Jenkins tucked the fur rug around her knees.

"Minx, I think, ma'am," he suggested, politely, for Billy was new to service

and didn't know when to be deaf; moreover, his language was illiterate.

"Mrs. Carter's," was the order, and the pretty toy with its angry occupant was whirled a mile uptown.

CHAPTER II.

Blessed be fresh air and motion! Under the exhilaration of her rapid drive Priscilla's worries ceased to rankle. She began to see dimly that the situation had another side not without compensations. Why should she be crushed by the sudden change her life had taken? youth and happiness were still hers, and love might come her way; not the shadowy silhouette, but the rosy flesh and blood boy-god. Yesterday to obey his blind dictates would have seemed a desertion of her home interests, but to-day—under the disguise of bondage—her freedom had been given her, she was no longer the sole guardian of her father's happiness.

But suppose love never came her way—melancholy suggested in a dying effort to drag down her rising spirits, and as if in answer a hansom passed her and Lord Bassford leaned forward to give his passing salutation all the significance possible.

How handsome he was—how distinguished—how unaffected. She had often heard his high-bred face called supercilious, but to her the expression was boyishly sweet. She knew what fires of excitement could blaze in those sleepy blue eyes—how they kindled at any tale of heroism or endurance—what powers of description and narration were his.

Her father, like all older men, was influenced by club gossip, which credited Lord Bassford with having come to this country to marry money, but Prissy knew he had come on Clarence Bullion's yacht just for the fun of the voyage over—and for a little hunting and shooting. She also knew about his private affairs, for he had told her, sitting close beside her tea table only two days before, in one of those late afternoon visits her father had reprobated.

The whole case was as plain as a, b, c.

He was a poor peer—there you had it in a nutshell. It meant that his position involved an expenditure out of all proportion to his income. He had said:

"My uncle left every penny he could lay his hands on to his daughter. I only got with the title the place in Dorsetshire and the moor in Scotland. Both places are leased for a term of years. The English place pays the interest on my debts and the Scotch shooting keeps me in coats and hats. My uncle on his deathbed advised me to marry a rich wife. I certainly cannot marry a poor one, but I need not marry at all!"

Surely the explanation was simple and manly, but there was no use in offering it at second hand to her father. Ideas filter into the minds of the middle-aged through such a crust of worldliness. She sighed as her carriage drew up at Mrs. Carter's door.

Bassford's hansom was turning away and the gentleman himself was waiting on the steps in company with his servant and a portmanteau, which reminded Miss Vyner that it was a dress rehearsal, a fact which had escaped her memory in the agitation of events. Not that it mattered; her part was insignificant and her toilet of little moment.

He was at her side before Billy Jenkins could scramble from the box, and they went up the steps in eager conversation, followed by Billy's admiring eyes.

"Ain't he a corker?" said that functionary to Plummer. "I tell yer them shoulders 'u'd set off any coat."

But Plummer shook his head.

"'Ansome is as 'ansome does," he answered. "Keep your heye on that minx rug."

Harriet Carter was as a feather bed to the restlessness of Prissy's emotions. She was impressionable, yet supporting; she enveloped with her sympathies, but permitted an easy effacement of inconvenient memories. She came forward to greet her guests with a gentle summing up of annoyances that would have tried the temper of a less placid hostess.

"I hope you won't mind waiting a few minutes. Our stage manager is late, and Jessie Nugent is in tears because

her Pomeranian is having a fit in my dressing-room, and Bob has just telephoned to have somebody take his part, as he has been arrested for running his motor too fast over the viaduct, and it is too early for tea, so you might as well talk to me."

But before Priscilla could seat herself half a dozen people in the summer costumes of the play came into the room, and under cover of their chatter Bassford made a request.

"Would you mind hearing me say the end of my part? It won't take me five minutes to dress, and I will join you in the smoking-room. You are such a good coach," he added, persuasively.

The world seldom imputes guile to very young women, but I fancy the most unsophisticated are as capable of coquettish design as their more experienced sisters. Certainly when Priscilla acquiesced in Lord Bassford's suggestion, she knew the smoking-room was rarely invaded, and the part he wished to repeat to her was full of impassioned love. It was equally certain that she was not prepared to accept any definite outcome of the interview. She neither wished to engage herself to him nor to let him go, but he had suddenly acquired a new interest in her eyes; she had been cruelly wounded in her affections and longed for consolation such as Bassford could give her. Mrs. Rawlston had prejudiced her father against him, and Priscilla's sense of justice made her his champion; and then, over and above all this, was the morbid curiosity of the woman to see the man she had hitherto known as a friend under the transformation of strong emotion. Perhaps it is unjust to call the curiosity morbid, for with many natures it is the only test; it may irrevocably disgust or it may carry the object of its love on the flood tide of its passion.

Priscilla's manner of leaving the assembled company was, to say the least, unostentatious. It was by a series of strategic halts which brought her ever nearer the door, and then, taking advantage of Mrs. Nugent's tempestuous return, she hurried down the hall and opened the smoking-room door.

Bassford was already there and came forward to meet her.

"So good of you!" he murmured, gratefully.

He closed the door, standing for a moment with his back against it and his hand on the knob. The polished mahogany made a fine background for his picturesque figure, but to do him justice he was quite unconscious of it. He was thinking how much the winning of Priscilla Vyner meant to him.

He was not a tall man, but finely proportioned, with good hands and feet and his head well put on his shoulders. He was blond almost to effeminacy and had a habit of letting his eyelids droop, which made it impossible to surprise his thoughts. His present costume, the uniform of a subaltern in the French army, was especially becoming, for it gave him a dash and brilliancy that was often lacking.

The play was an amateur adaptation of Mrs. Jenkins' charming novel, "*Madame de Beaupré*," and Lord Bassford, who took the part of the hero, *Savoisy*, made one long moan because Miss Vyner was not in the title rôle.

He came over to the fireplace where she stood and handed her the book open at the place where *Mme. de Beaupré*, having sprained her foot in trying to overtake her too restrained lover in a friend's garden, at last forces a confession of his love.

Priscilla pointed to a large armchair.

"We will pretend that it is the rustic seat in the garden, and that I have managed to get to it unassisted. Now begin."

Savoisy: Will you permit me to assist you?

Mme. de Beaupré: No, you are too—indifferent.

Savoisy: Good God, madame! how have I deserved such an accusation?

Mme. de Beaupré: It is your fault I have sprained my ankle, torn my dress and scratched my hands. Look!

Priscilla's voice was childishly petulant; she held out her hand, and Bassford kissed it.

"Don't!" she cried. "It isn't in the part."

"But it's in my heart," he answered.

"Will you be kind enough to go on," she said, with dignity.

Savoisy: May I leave you to go and bring a chair to carry you to the house?

Mme. de Beaupré: No, you shall not leave me. I demand to know why you have given up coming to see me, why you avoid me so carefully—

Savoisy: I have avoided you because I love you.

Was Bassford only a good actor, Priscilla wondered. His voice was strangely unsteady, and some instinct warned the girl not to look up if she wished to preserve conventionality. With her eyes on the book she continued:

Mme. de Beaupré: A strange proof of love.

Savoisy: The greatest and best I could give. I am not a fit match for you.

Mme. de Beaupré: Are you married?

Here their eyes met with a meaning smile.

Savoisy: I have never loved or imagined I loved any woman but you. I know now that I loved you from the first moment I saw you. One evening you gave me your hand; you did it carelessly, but it made my heart like to burst—as now.

Once more Bassford possessed himself of her hand and raised it to his lips. Priscilla snatched it away.

"This is the second time you have done that," she said, reprovingly. "You need not be so realistic off the stage. There! they are ringing a bell—it must be for the curtain—be quick!"

Savoisy: I love you; I shall always love you. I am all yours—heart, soul, body—my whole being! Do you believe me?

"If I were poor I should believe him and love him," thought Priscilla.

Mme. de Beaupré: I believe you.

Savoisy: You must believe that I am yours now and forever; far or near, it will be the same thing. I never meant to tell you!

Mme. de Beaupré: Why not?

Savoisy: Of what use? Obstacles will be put in your way! But I am glad that you should know—I would die for you—I wish I could! I wish I might die this instant—thus!

And Lord Bassford slipped to the floor and laid his head against her knees.

This time Priscilla was really angry—she pushed him away and stood up in her indignation.

"One reproof should have been enough," she said, with trembling lips. "I told you not to be so realistic."

"You must know how great the temptation was," he began.

"To take advantage of a woman!" snapped Prissy.

"Pardon me," he said. "To let the words speak for me. Surely you must have guessed my feelings long ago." But before Priscilla could answer Mrs. Carter hurried into the room.

"What are you two doing here?" she asked in surprise. "Lord Bassford, they are calling you; you should be on the stage now."

He picked up his cap and ran—murmuring as he went:

"True to her sex! Give a man every encouragement and then turn on him! Serve you right, too, you damned ass, for trying to play the American-girl-game!" The last apostrophe was to himself.

"Harriet," said Priscilla, slipping her hand into her friend's, "the world has turned a sunset since this morning. Papa is going to marry Mrs. Rawlston."

"My poor child!" said Harriet, with ready sympathy. "What a strange fancy on his part! Still, as Lord Bassford wants to marry you—"

"That's just it!" exclaimed Priscilla. "It is partly to protect me from the Ineligible (spelt with a capital) that he is giving me a stepmother."

"Inconvenient, isn't it?" said the placid Harriet. "Still you always have

me, dear, to fall back on. Don't flout your father, if you can avoid it; it is so *bourgeoise*."

"But suppose I really care for Lord Bassford?" inquired Priscilla.

"You don't, though," answered Mrs. Carter. "You are only trembling on the brink. Go slowly, Prissy. I assure you it pays in the end."

Priscilla looked at the imperturbable sweetness of Harriet's face, her young portliness, her air of contentment, and she turned upon the friend of her heart with some sharpness.

"Harriet," she said, "you don't understand the rudiments of strong feeling. The greatest joy on earth you would accept with acquiescence, and I am sure you will bear your griefs by going to bed!"

CHAPTER III.

The days between the announcement of Mrs. Rawlston's engagement and her marriage were not many; as Vyner truly said, at their age they hadn't time to waste, and in regard to Priscilla's anticipations they were so much more gloomy than the reality could possibly prove that her father was anxious to substitute fact for fancy.

Before the happy event took place, however, the girl proposed of her own accord to give Mrs. Rawlston a dinner. The company was gathered in an impromptu manner at short notice, but so great was the curiosity to see the elderly *fiancés* and to observe Miss Vyner's conduct under the new conditions, that every one accepted who could.

Priscilla submitted her list to her father for approval, and he remarked, with some amusement and more chagrin, that it was composed almost exclusively of Prissy's most volatile acquaintances.

"Why not ask a few of Mrs. Rawlston's friends?" he suggested—"the people she would really be glad to see."

"You and she can entertain *that kind* for the rest of your lives," the girl returned. "My object is to pretend to the worst gossips in town that you and I are of one mind."

He laughed and then sighed—opened his lips to speak, but found silence the better part.

"As you like, my dear," he said.

So the evening brought an assemblage of butterflies that seemed likely to prove more of a revelation than an entertainment to the lady for whom the dinner was given, for Mrs. Rawlston, having no daughter to introduce, had withdrawn from general society and surrounded herself with old friends whose tastes accorded with her own.

Prissy in virgin white, with no jewels, stood by her father, receiving their guests and ostentatiously convoying each arrival to her future stepmother if she had reason to suppose them unknown to Mrs. Rawlston.

Mr. and Mrs. Carter were there as a matter of course—for Priscilla could find nothing complete without Harriet—and Lord Bassford, perfectly groomed and frankly in love. He was not entirely restored to favor, but had been asked because Priscilla's heart smote her for unkindness and she meant to give him an opportunity to sue for peace.

A momentary pause at the door, owing to some flirtatious skirmishing on the part of Mrs. Nugent, gave Mr. Vyner a chance to whisper to his daughter:

"Who is the man talking to Mrs. Nugent at the door? I met him last evening and failed to catch his name."

"Your card visited him a week ago, dear," she answered, laughing. "He brought us letters. It is Mr. Haskins, the novelist. Hasn't he the dreamiest, kindest face in the world?"

But there was little time to do more than welcome the great man, for he was quickly followed by the success of the winter—the beautiful Lady Pengordon. Her ladyship was an American marchioness whose noble lord was at the moment disporting himself at Monte Carlo, while she (in the language of the street) was working the social market here for all it was worth. As Miss Priggins, society had turned a cold shoulder on her millions; as Lady Pengordon, fast and insolent, it could not sufficiently court her company.

The marchioness arrived with the

Spencer Ingots, with whom she was staying. She had made them the fashion and felt that they owed her more than she was likely to get out of them.

Last of all came Mr. and Mrs. Peter Augustus Vanderlyn, and the wonder was that the very furniture didn't trot forward and make obeisance, for Vanderlyn held schemes in his little cocoanut of a head to control half the railroads in the country, and his shriveled figure loomed large in Wall Street. Mrs. Vanderlyn was of the exuberant type in person as well as in her flow of spirits—she fairly bounced with the joy of living.

Philip Rawlston and a few unattached men made up the party.

Prissy's dinners were never marshaled like Noah's animals—the male and his female—there was always an extra allowance of men. We are told that a redundancy of women is one of the first effects of artificial life on the population, but certainly New York (the most artificial city of the continent) puts on a particularly virile aspect in its social gatherings.

Priscilla sat between Mr. Rawlston and Mr. Peter Augustus Vanderlyn, who was not likely to make any serious demand on her attentions, inasmuch as eating furnished him with the only ungilded pleasure in life, and he gave his great mind to its enjoyment.

Mr. Vyner had taken out Mrs. Rawlston, and the marchioness sat on his other side.

Prissy had raised some question of precedence, but Mr. Vyner set it aside, declaring that such things did not exist in this country outside official life, and at all events that Mrs. Rawlston and her son were the guests of the occasion.

Priscilla's conversation with Mr. Peter Augustus was little more than a monologue on her part, interspersed with irrelevant interjections on his, such as:

"I don't eat oysters—typhoid germs—yes, the thin soup! Your cook does this boned shad fairly well—personally I like horse-radish with the parsley butter, but that is a matter of taste—" and so on for three courses till, with a sense of duty done, she turned to Philip.

"Why wouldn't you see me when I called yesterday afternoon?" he asked.

"I suppose I was out," she answered, mendaciously.

"On the contrary, your hall was full of coats and hats," he protested.

"Ah! that was my kindergarten," she said, smiling at her own outrageous fib.

"A little less than kin and more than kind," he retorted. "I don't blame you for finding other men more worth while, but you might have guessed that there are many things I want to talk over with you."

"It must have been my prophetic soul that made me deny myself to any more visitors, for most certainly I do not enjoy talking things over with you, Mr. Rawlston. I don't like your methods."

"Too abrupt?" he inquired. "I can easily make them more roundabout."

"Why do you care how I accept my fate?" she asked, in a tone half sad, half irritable. "Am I not behaving prettily to-night?"

"My dear little lady," he said, "you are so pathetic in your efforts that my heart aches for you."

He expected a sharp rebuff, but instead Priscilla raised dove's eyes to his face as she answered:

"I believe you are the only one who understands."

In the meanwhile Mrs. Peter Augustus was harrying the marchioness with plain speaking all her own.

"I tell Polly"—here she indicated Lady Pengordon with a wave of her fork—"that she is having the time of her life. It is all very well to go over to London to snatch a title, but New York is the place to enjoy it when *snaught*. We don't make distinctions here between domestic goods and foreign as they do across the water. A peeress is a peeress here to be toadied and groveled to! If any one is thinking of buying you, Bassford—and a damn bad purchase you'd be—I advise her to keep you just where you are; she'll get more return for her money in this country than in yours."

"Your countrywomen can go you one better than that, Mrs. Vanderlyn; they don't want me at any price," said Lord Bassford, amiably.

"Go West, young man," she cackled. Mrs. Rawlston's face was a study; bad words and personalities were innovations she was little prepared for, but her sense of humor was tickled in spite of her disappointment.

"Are the Western girls more pronounced pro-Anglicans than our own?" she asked, smiling.

"They don't hear so much transatlantic gossip," explained Mrs. Peter Augustus. "They are more apt to accept a title on its face value, and that is Lord Bassford's only chance," and she blew him a kiss across the table.

"Won't somebody call her off?" begged her victim, and as if in response to his appeal came a suppressed cry from the other end of the table.

A flaring candle had set fire to its little flowery shade, and a servant in removing it dropped a fragment on Miss Vyner's tulle skirt. A blaze was so instantaneous that if Rawlston had not almost anticipated the mishap he would not have been quick enough to prevent serious mischief. As it happened, the only apparent result was a ruined breadth in the satin skirt, and a napkin in holes, but Philip's shirt cuff concealed a scorched wrist that was giving him such extreme discomfort that he would have left the table if Priscilla's deadly whiteness had not made him fear she was going to faint.

Why he chose to constitute himself the girl's especial Providence he could not have told, but she had appealed to his simple heart, and he was beginning to ponder over her sorrows and caprices in a way far from conducive to his peace of mind.

He noticed her wineglasses, though filled, were untouched, and pushing her champagne toward her, he whispered:

"Drink it to give yourself a brace."

She shook her head.

"I don't like it," she said.

"Priscilla," he said, severely and quite unconsciously, "do as I tell you."

She swallowed a small portion of the prickly liquid, and a lovely color swept over her cheeks. Bassford saw it from the other end of the table, and, moved to admiration, regretted having played

the fool the day of the rehearsal; and poor bruin also saw it, and forgetting his pain, said:

"Now that is something like!" thinking his remedy had proved its efficacy.

But Priscilla knew that her blush was in sudden anger at being called by her first name so publicly by Rawlston, and then in shame that she should feel anger against the man who had just saved her from disfiguration—perhaps from death.

The whole occurrence was so momentary that some of the guests hardly knew what had happened, and Vyner and Mrs. Rawlston, the farthest removed from the excitement, thought the candle shade had furnished the only cause of alarm.

Mrs. Nugent, whose widowed heart was always full of sympathy, held her peace long enough to give Miss Vyner a chance to express her gratitude, but when she found no such sentiment forthcoming, she proceeded to administer consolation to Rawlston.

"Dear Mr. Rawlston," she sighed, "I am sure you burned your hand, though you won't admit it. I never saw anything done so bravely and so cleverly! I don't believe Miss Vyner quite appreciates what she owes to you or she couldn't take it quite so—philosophically."

This was murmured in his ear, but it irritated him to crossness.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed. "What would you expect her to do? Make a scene at the table? The servant could have done it just as well as I did if he had had both hands free; really, it isn't worth discussing."

After this nothing would have persuaded Philip to acknowledge the injury he had received, and a few minutes later the ladies left the table.

As they gathered around the drawing-room fire Priscilla's burned dress attracted general attention, and she was obliged to describe the minutest particulars to those who had not been near enough to see the incident for themselves. She did so unwillingly, and while making a pleasant enough tribute to Mr. Rawlston's services, there was a lack of effusion that struck that young

gentleman's mother as rather cold-hearted.

Turning away from her future step-daughter, she found herself close to Mrs. Vanderlyn, who invited her to share her sofa by patting the seat, much as you encourage a well-behaved dog to take a liberty. Between her sips of coffee she even went so far as to drag Mrs. Rawlston up to the point already reached in the conversation between herself and Mrs. Ingot.

"Mrs. Ingot was just telling me about poor Bryson—you know Jim Bryson, the crude-oil man—he has had to go to the surgical hospital for such a strange operation. Go on, Sarah; what was it exactly?"

"They cut a hole in him from *there* to *there*," said Mrs. Ingot, solemnly indicating two widely separated points on her plump little person, "and they hooked out all of his organs——"

"Why, Sarah, they couldn't!" broke in Mrs. Vanderlyn.

"They did; and — *washed* — *everything*!"

"Then he'll die! Bryson's insides never will stand the shock of undiluted water!" Mrs. Peter Augustus cackled. "Why, what's the matter with you?" she exclaimed, turning upon Mrs. Rawlston.

Poor Mrs. Rawlston belonged to a generation who considered the details of illness too intimate a subject for general discussion, and to be forced to invade the sanctity of a gentleman's interior in company with his surgeon's knife was, to say the least, distasteful.

She professed to find the fire rather too powerful and moved to a seat beside the marchioness, who had just dropped the stub of her cigarette into the saucer of her coffee cup and seemed ready to be amused.

In response to some question in regard to dinner-giving among the smart people in England, Mrs. Rawlston received still another shock.

"They are not so yoked in couples as they are here," Lady Pengordon explained, with a fairly well acquired English accent, "If a man happens to be amusing, you ask him without saddling yourself with the incubus of a dull wife

—and *vice versa*. Pengordon and I rarely dine out together," she added, with a supercilious smile, "his friends are so terribly *déclassés* that they are simply impossible, and he declares he finds mine only a wishy-washy imitation of the real wrong thing."

Mrs. Rawlston looked nervously around, fearing Priscilla might be within hearing, but that young lady was deep in conversation with Mrs. Nugent, and safe from the corruption of evil communications.

"Yes," Mrs. Nugent was saying, "I look upon the play at the Carters' last night as a distinct success, though perhaps I ought not to say so, considering I had the most prominent part. People just rave about the way I did *Mme. de Beaupré*. Doesn't Lord Bassford play an admirable lover? I told him I was afraid it was the result of too much experience!" And Mrs. Nugent looked arch.

"Perhaps it wasn't all play," suggested Priscilla, knowing the vanity of the pretty widow.

"You have noticed it, then!" exclaimed Mrs. Nugent with the air of conceding a conquest. "And yet people are so short-sighted they think he is attentive to you."

"Impossible!" said Priscilla. "They must be blind to the feeling you and he put into your parts."

"Don't include *me*," she expostulated. "I have no feeling for any man till my two years of mourning are over."

"So discreet," murmured Priscilla, looking preternaturally grave. "But the time must be nearly up—you are in shades of lilac."

Mrs. Nugent glanced complacently at the lilac and point lace of her toilet while she counted rapidly on her fingers.

"In May," she said. "Poor Gilbert died a year ago last May; so that gives me nearly three months before I take off mourning, and Bassford knows it would be hopeless to ask me till then."

"Did you tell him?" asked Priscilla, resorting to a cough as she found her muscles getting beyond control.

"I said I knew I could trust a man of his perfect breeding not to turn play into

earnest till I gave him permission, and he said I could trust him till the moon turned blue! Bassford has a poet's nature!"

Further confidences were interrupted by the arrival of the poet of the blue moon in company with the rest of the gentlemen, and, oddly enough, ignoring Mrs. Nugent's smile of welcome, he promptly sought the society of his hostess.

It is one of the mysteries of the after-dinner hour that, no matter how absorbing the conversation of the women with each other, the advent of the men redistributes the company like a newly shuffled pack of cards.

Lord Bassford persuaded Priscilla to wander into the picture gallery with him, and there he managed to say a good many pleasant things before they parted. He was so penitent for having allowed his feelings to betray him at the rehearsal and so grateful to her for asking him to dine in spite of his folly that she was fain to promise him the cotillon that same evening at the Ingots'; for the marchioness was giving a dance, though the invitations happened to read "Mr. and Mrs. Ingot request the pleasure," etc.

At this concession Priscilla was recalled to the drawing-room—Mrs. Ingot was leaving in order to be at home before eleven—and the whole party broke up.

Mr. and Mrs. Carter were going for half an hour to what Prissy called "an obligation," in the neighborhood, and would stop on their return to take her on with them to Mrs. Ingot's.

Mrs. Rawlston left with Mr. Vyner in train, having offered him Philip's place in her brougham as far as his club. Her son bore the substitution with amiable amusement.

"I suppose I may walk," he observed.

"Much better for young legs," she answered, laughing.

Philip approached Priscilla to say good-night. He had stuffed his handkerchief between his wrist and the stiff edge of his cuff to stop the painful friction, and he held his hand behind his back as a discouragement to handshak-

ing. He made her a formal bow, but she had no idea of parting so ungraciously.

"I have something to say to you," she whispered. "Come back when you have handed your mother over to papa's escort."

He acquiesced gravely. For nearly two hours he had been in severe pain, and the delay was hard to bear, but he felt Priscilla's slightest wish compelling. He came in a few minutes, a pale, plain bruin, looking tired and dispirited.

Prissy held out both her hands.

"Did you think I didn't care?" she asked. "I cared so much that I was afraid I should break down if I tried to put my gratitude into words. Tears are so near the surface, at any rate, in these days. Won't you shake hands, Mr. Rawlston, to prove you believe me?"

He drew the injured hand from behind his back, and as he raised it her quick eye detected the handkerchief.

"You are burned!" she cried. "Oh, how shocking! And I have let you suffer through this long evening when I ought to have guessed it. Let me telephone for a doctor at once."

"A mere trifle," he laughed. "A good night's sleep will make it all right. I don't want a doctor."

"A burn is not a thing to be neglected," she said with authority. "If you will not give me your word to have it properly treated to-night, I shall attend to you myself."

"Oh, could you!" he said, gratefully.

It seemed so inexpressibly soothing to be made much of by Priscilla that he yielded without a qualm. A man more experienced with women would have recoiled from the idea of submitting any injury to the eyes of his ladylove, but bruin saw only an adorable womanliness in her anxiety, and perhaps after all he saw the real Priscilla.

She rang for the housekeeper, an old retainer who had once been her nurse, and they adjourned to Mr. Vyner's dressing-room, where Prissy performed her office with the skill of a trained nurse.

When the bandage was fastened and the wristband pulled down into place,

Rawlston's admiration had to express itself.

"How did you learn it?" he asked, amazed.

Priscilla lost patience.

"Because a woman happens to live in a large house, why must she be considered a brainless puppet? For two winters I have taken the lecture course on 'First Aid to the Injured,' and I happen to be quick with my hands. I have no sympathy with the fastidiousness that shrinks from helping a living creature for fear of seeing something painful."

It was the girl's reason that spoke rather than her sentiment, for in her heart she was thinking that Lord Bassford would have died before allowing her to do such a thing, and Rawlston's simplicity gave her a distinct feeling of contempt; and yet, unsuspected by her, the broad lines of manly kindness in his nature were winning for him a very real regard. She dismissed him with a word of kindness.

"Let me know how you are to-morrow. I shall not be happy till I hear you are out of pain. Now good-night. I must change this scorched frock before going on to the dance."

CHAPTER IV.

As Philip came out into the night air he found himself in a glow of charity with the world that contrasted strangely with his depression of an hour before. Priscilla's remedies had banished his pain, while her kindness had acted as a tonic to his spirits.

He turned into Fifth Avenue and walked briskly south. The moon was doing her mightiest to illuminate the town—an audacious challenge to the Electric Light Company—the roadway was gay with carriages, the sidewalk with gentlemen in fur-lined coats and mufflers, all hastening to or from some scene of amusement. Domestic husbands were exercising wheezy house dogs, rakish pussy cats were stealing to back-fence appointments—the theatres were just out and crowds were surging

into Sherry's and Delmonico's to end the evening with a little creature comfort.

At Forty-second Street there was a momentary block in the stream of carriages, and Philip, who was close to the curbstone, found the Carters' private omnibus almost at his elbow. Priscilla was so close that he tapped the glass of her window, and she turned her lovely little head and smiled.

A sudden desire seized the young man to be leading her life—doing the same things simply and naturally, that other men in his position did, and which he had hitherto despised as silly. His shoulders squared themselves with a new resolution; he turned into Madison Avenue and a few blocks brought him to his own house.

Letting himself in, he bounded upstairs and knocked at his mother's door. That she was not asleep was certain, for her maid was toiling up the next flight of stairs with the discarded finery of that evening's toilet over her arm.

"Mother," he began almost before she could bid him come in, "are we invited to the Ingots?"

Mrs. Rawlston, in dressing gown and slippers, had settled herself in her most comfortable chair by the fire to enjoy an hour's reading before going to bed.

"Really, I forget," she answered. "I decline all these things as a matter of course and only register the names in order to leave cards. Bring me that red book on my desk."

He dashed across the room as if every moment were precious and brought the book. She opened it at "I" and out dropped the Ingot invitation.

A shade of annoyance crossed her face.

"I fear I never answered it at all," she said, "but the days have been so over-filled of late that many things have escaped me. Did you want to go, Philip?" This in a tone of amazement.

"Why shouldn't I go?" he asked, defiantly; and then he grew self-conscious and then boyishly active.

He wandered to his mother's dressing table and began putting her tortoise shell hairpins astride her button hook till he succeeded in breaking the legs of a good

half dozen, and then he fitted her rings as crowns to her hatpins till a priceless emerald escaped and rolled under the bed, and in order to reach it he shoved the bed against a small table, set out with a siphon and some glasses, and sent the whole toppling over in a splendid crash.

His mother might have been forgiven a wave of annoyance, but her command of temper was perfect; perhaps the thought that their days together were numbered made her son's childishness pathetic.

"Isn't it rather late," she suggested, "if you are going to the dance?"

He glanced at the clock. It was already past twelve, and he came and stood beside her as if to say good-night.

"Wasn't Priscilla beautiful to-night?" burst from him, as if he had to share his thoughts with some one. "You must be very patient with her, mother."

"She strikes me as a young woman extremely capable of fighting her own battles," Mrs. Rawlston answered. "Suppose you suggest to Priscilla to be a little tender with me?"

Philip's face wrinkled itself into the smile that always transformed his ugliness into charm.

"Dear old mummy," he said. "You have no idea how sometimes you freeze people with the cold righteousness of your manner. Not those you love," he hastened to add, seeing her look of pain.

"Your phrases stick in the memory, Philip," she said with resentment. "Cold righteousness" is a description hard to accept."

"It only describes you when you let your New England conscience out for an airing," he said, kissing her. "Where I am concerned you are immorally lenient. Good-night."

"Stop a moment, Phil," she cried. "I must confess—you are right. I *am* prejudiced in regard to Priscilla. She seems to me self-centered and masterful, but that need not influence my conduct. I can be just."

"Can you?" he asked, gravely. "I doubt it."

"Surely I must succeed where I so passionately desire to do right," she said, getting up and leaning her elbow

on the mantelpiece that her face might be concealed. "Perhaps I resent Priscilla's influence with her father—we never know the depths of our own weakness—perhaps I am vulgarly jealous—but I care for him so infinitely," she went on in a low tone, "that it is bitter to share his affection."

"You have had a lonely life, dear mummy," Philip said, stroking her bent head; "I hope the happiness will come now in a flood."

When Mrs. Rawlston raised her head he was gone. As her momentary excitement subsided she would have given the world to recall much that she had said. By admitting her prejudice she had given it a weight and an importance in her own mind and Philip's beyond what was true—she had shown her high standards to be of little inherent strength—she felt humiliated. Above all this she began to suspect that Philip had come to her with new interests of his own to confide, and she had been too self-centered to understand. Just what she had accused Priscilla of being. She felt ruffled in spirit, at odds with herself, provokingly wide awake. The saintly woman would have betaken herself to her "Imitation," the worldly to a novel, but Mrs. Rawlston, with a Paganish leaning toward the practical, applied a little gentle philosophy. She took from her table a worn-out volume called "Friends in Council" and read with a kind of reverent amusement Sir Arthur Helps' masterly essay "On the Art of Living with Others."

In the meanwhile Philip was making his somewhat belated bow to Mrs. Ingot.

The Ingots had been wise enough to ignore fashion in their location. When increasing riches developed social ambitions they bought almost half a block in a part of town rarely chosen by the society crowd, and there they built a palace ample enough to permit hospitality almost regal.

"Make your entertainments worth while, and people will pursue you to the middle of the river," Mrs. Peter Augustus assured her new friend, Mrs. Ingot; and, acting upon the advice, the lady had dazzled New York with con-

cert-hall celebrities, and operatic stars, and parlor magic, and anything surprising she happened to hear of; but the evening of Philip Rawlston's *début* she was giving a simple dance with a few thousands sunk in the cotillon favors.

Mrs. Ingot had been receiving at the head of the great staircase, which was one of the magnificent features of the house, but she had gone with the rest of the world to supper before Philip appeared upon the scene, and he had to follow her into the dining-room. This, as well as the vast library beyond, was filled with little tables holding groups of four or six, and seemed to Philip's unaccustomed eyes to savor too much of the restaurant.

Having spoken to his hostess, he was looking anxiously about for Priscilla, when he felt his coat tails tweaked from behind and Mrs. Vanderlyn's cackle assailed his ears.

"Sit down here, Mr. Rawlston, and have supper with Mr. Carter and me; we've a table to our lonelies."

"So I observed," answered Rawlston, his glance roving rapidly from table to table. "I hardly ventured to disturb you when I saw Carter's look of beatitude."

"Oh! Carter and I must conceal our passion," returned Mrs. Vanderlyn, mockingly, at the highest pitch of her high-pitched voice. "His wife has noticed it. Yes, it will be town talk directly if we don't throw a cloak over it."

A hopelessly puzzled look crossed the dull face of the "passionate" Carter.

"Your prudence does you credit," said Rawlston, laughing, as he drew out a chair and seated himself beside her. "I suppose I'm the cloak."

"The world will doubtless judge us less harshly while you are present," said the lady, making her somewhat bold face demure by pursing up her lips. "But you are a rare bird at routs, aren't you? I don't believe I ever saw you in my life before we met at the Vyners' this evening—and yet I suppose you existed!"

"Very imperfectly, Mrs. Vanderlyn, before I met you," answered Rawlston, much amused.

"There's many a true word spoken in jest," the lady responded. "I am a necessary tonic to all these enervated people. They would live in a mist of unreality if I didn't introduce them to themselves sometimes with a few plain words, as I dare say you noticed at dinner. I hope I didn't shock Mrs. Rawlston. By the way, what relation does *your* mother's marriage to *her* father make *you* to Priscilla Vyner?"

"Is it a riddle, Mrs. Vanderlyn?" asked Rawlston.

"Not to us who saw your gallantry at dinner——" began his volatile neighbor, but her attention was distracted by Lady Pengordon, who passed the table with Clarence Bullion, the leader of the cotillon, and Rawlston was spared more personal remarks.

"We are going to begin the cotillon at once," said the marchioness. "Have you good seats, Mrs. Peter?"

Mrs. Vanderlyn looked knowingly at Mr. Bullion and winked.

"I'd like to know why I've been asking Clary Bullion to dinner all this winter if it weren't to get good seats when I want them; what I need is a partner."

Carter and Rawlston sprang to their feet and simultaneously offered her their arms.

"*Quel embarras de choix!*" she exclaimed. "I think I shall take Bobby, Mr. Rawlston—thanking you all the same—he is such a restful companion." And she bore off her sedate little partner in the wake of the marchioness.

The ballroom was an enormous picture gallery built out at the back of the house, aired and lighted from the top. The little gilt chairs against the walls were being eagerly claimed, the Hungarians in their green uniforms were in their places in the music balcony, as Rawlston sauntered in and stood near the entrance, watching the gay throng settle themselves for the cotillon. There were amicable wrangles over seats, invitations to dance given and accepted, girls watching anxiously for partners who were lingering over supper or enjoying a few puffs of a cigarette in the smoking-room, and then suddenly everything seemed to straighten out; the

music began and the first figure usurped the floor.

Priscilla came in among the last with Lord Bassford and passed so close to Philip that her dress brushed his knee, but for some reason he did not seek to make himself known. He heard Bassford say, reproachfully:

"I wish you were not so immoderately fond of dancing; I should so much prefer sitting out in the conservatory."

To which Priscilla answered:

"When you learn to dance like an American you will be immoderately fond of it, too. Oh, do be quick or we shall miss our turn!"

A huge swan was being pushed around the room on invisible wheels, its pasteboard emptiness filled with pale green satin bags tied with water lilies. "Favors for favors," Priscilla called these pouches, in which the guests were to carry off the loot from the coming figures.

Philip was perfectly happy listening to the music and watching Priscilla. From the topmost curl of her head to the toe of her little satin slipper she was as perfect as nature and fashion combined could make a mortal woman. She was always on the floor, always being taken away from Bassford, which was in itself a pleasure to Philip—recluse that he was, he still had heard rumors of the Englishman's devotion.

The figures succeeded each other rapidly, the favors ever growing in value; there were fans and hunting crops, silver hand mirrors and cigarette cases, till the climax of fashionable vulgarity was reached by the marchioness and Mrs. Ingot going the rounds distributing delicate jeweled bracelets and scarf pins.

Philip whispered a request to Lady Pengordon as she and Mrs. Ingot came through the door with their baskets of glistening baubles. She selected a chain of East Indian workmanship set with tiny stones.

"Shall we let him have it, Mrs. Ingot?" she asked. "You know he is not dancing and we should not encourage men to play caryatids, holding up the pillars of the doorway. Oh, well, per-

haps we will make an exception to the rule, as I understand this is your *début*," and she tossed the bracelet to him.

Philip hurried across the room to Priscilla and offered his favor.

"You, Mr. Rawlston!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "What business have you to be out with that burned wrist? I never expected to see you at a ball—you don't mean to tell me that you dance?" she added, incredulously.

"Try me," said Philip, and they whirled off in perfect unison, the best waltz that Priscilla had had for many a day.

"What a strange creature you are," she said. "You dance like a dream and never go out. Why do you despise amusements?"

"I don't," he answered. "I could hunt five days out of the seven and play polo all the year round, and rackets, and squash, and golf, and tennis—"

"In short," she interrupted, "any game where you can ignore the presence of women—that is ungallant, Mr. Rawlston!"

"You know that isn't true," he answered, putting all the meaning in his tone he dared.

"What! you are a squire of dames?" she said, teasingly. "And all these years we have thought you a man's man."

"What can such a change portend?" he asked, smiling; then, stopping suddenly near a door that opened into the conservatory, added: "Come in here out of the noise and heat."

He held aside the projecting palms, and Priscilla led the way down the narrow, tiled path until she reached a rustic seat beside the fountain, where the waters made a gentle splashing and little, bull-headed fishes with gaudy coats of gold and black were swimming around and around like Rhine maidens. She seated herself, and sweeping aside her draperies, made room for Philip beside her. As she did so the bracelet in her hand slipped from her grasp and, sliding down the satin of her skirt, fell plump into the water with a fine splash. The fish maidens shook their tails in dismay and scurried to the farther side of their

pool; so much gold unattached to their own burnished sides was alarming to piscatory courage.

Priscilla gave a cry of regret and peered after her bracelet among the pebbles at the bottom. Philip broke a stalk from a palm and tried to lift it out, but the water was deeper than he thought and the backbone of the palm wobbly, and after several vain efforts he went to look for a less flexible stick.

No sooner had he turned his back than Priscilla tore off a glove and, kneeling by the pool—a fountain nymph in pink satin—she plunged her bare arm in and recovered the trinket. This was easy, but to withdraw a dripping arm when you have only a cobweb pocket handkerchief, and when your ball dress may be ruined by the stains, is quite another matter.

Priscilla called to Rawlston and continued to kneel, admiring her own slender fingers under the water. The fishes grew bold and tried to nibble her thumb, and she made a feint of catching them that sent them swimming off in great confusion. She actually touched the tail of one blundering old maiden, who promptly sank to the bottom, head first, in complete collapse, and the play became so amusing that Priscilla forgot Philip till she saw him standing beside her with an expanse of masculine handkerchief in his hand, delighted with her childish folly.

She rose to her feet, holding out her arm, which he dried with painstaking care, trying to banish any appearance of pleasure in his task, and all the time his heart was thumping and the telltale color mounting to his face.

But Priscilla knew nothing of these signs. She thanked him simply and asked him to dry the bracelet that still lay on the tiles at their feet. He patted it gently in his handkerchief, examining the knobs and stones of its links before he undid the clasp.

"You like it well enough to wear?" he asked, and when she nodded, he went on: "You see it has the advantage of being a present from Mrs. Ingot, and therefore something you can take from me. Hold out your arm. See, I clasp

it and you will wear it as a pledge of our friendship. If ever I can help you—if the changes that are coming bring unhappiness to you, poor little girl—remember that you have my sympathy and that it is yours through everything."

"You are so grave," she said, raising anxious eyes to his. "Do you think bad days are waiting for me, Mr. Philip? Will your mother steal all papa's love? Shall I be left quite disconsolate?"

"Heaven forbid!" he answered. "But you live in my thoughts as a child needing protection, and if in any way you should suffer through my mother's new happiness, I long to make it up to you. At any rate I want you to know that I care."

A very tender smile was on the girl's lips, but the only words that came were the prosaic ones:

"I am woman enough to value friendship when it is offered to me." And they returned to the ballroom to find the cotillon nearly over, the maddest of polkas in progress and Lord Bassford distinctly sulky.

CHAPTER V.

Two days before the wedding Priscilla sat waiting for her father till close upon midnight.

She had made herself comfortable by curling up in a huge armchair by the fire with a new novel for company, but she was not reading.

The love affairs of the Vyner household furnished excitement enough to absorb her thoughts. Bassford had gone South on a shooting trip; at all events that was the ostensible reason for his going, but perhaps he was trying the effect of absence with his capricious lady-love. She missed him to a degree that frightened her, for she had not definitely made up her mind to defy her father by marrying against his wishes, and she liked to think her heart well within her own control. Hitherto a new flirtation would have given zest to the interval, but for the first time she found the very presence of other men a bore.

Her grievances against Mrs. Rawlston grew and multiplied in proportion as a returning tenderness for her father made her shrink from holding him responsible for her unhappiness. That lady's shoulders would have drooped with discouragement if she had suspected the weight of iniquity laid upon them in Priscilla's imagination. Among other fierce charges, the girl arraigned her stepmother for trying to keep her father away from her—monopolizing him at the time she needed him most—selfishly separating them before the final separation of his marriage. It was true that opportunities to see him privately were rare indeed, as the arrangements incident to his wedding trip claimed his attention. He was going to California, and while he was no longer in active business, he was a man of many affairs and bought his holidays at the expense of much personal inconvenience; so Wall Street absorbed his daylight hours and Mrs. Rawlston his evenings, and Priscilla furiously raged in her heart, and, like many before her, imagined a vain thing. This evening, however, tenderness rode triumphant. By an heroic effort she determined to forgive everything and show him plainly the depths of the love he was slighting.

At last she heard the click of his latch-key and the cautious shutting of the front door. Perhaps interviews with his daughter had lost their charm and were apt to turn into scenes under the high-pressure state of her feelings; certain it is that he was tiptoeing noiselessly up to bed, when he heard her call him, and turning into the library, came upon her lonely vigil.

"Why are you up so late, Priscilla?" he asked, with the irritable solicitude by which men anticipate a reproach.

"Chiefly, I believe, because it makes me unhappy to go to bed without kissing you." The words were almost a sob, the face raised to his, innocent and loving as the child of long ago.

Her gentle mood gave Vyner a vague sense of discomfort. In old times submission on her part meant a condoning of past offenses on his, and a compromise by which she got as much of her

own way as he could accord while preserving a shred of authority. Now a time had come when no compromise was open; he had committed himself to a course of action that must of necessity bring her pain. His refuge was to give the conversation a practical turn. He threw a letter on the table.

"By the way," he said, "I have heard from your old governess, Miss Goring. She writes that she will be here the afternoon of the wedding and will stay as long as you want her."

"That will be just five minutes," said Priscilla, mischievously, but with no temper. "It is hard to drag about the ball and chain of uncongenial companionship! But Gorry is a good creature in her way, and an example to governesses. I don't really mind her coming back for a few weeks, just 'To hold together what I was and am,'" she misquoted.

Mr. Vyner, not being a student of Mrs. Browning, did not see the application; his eyes were fixed upon a letter lying close to the one he had thrown down, and directed in Priscilla's clear hand to the "Viscount Bassford, Metropolitan Club, Washington."

"Why are you writing to Lord Bassford?" he asked, with vexation.

The letter was unsealed and the girl handed it to him with the explanation:

"Lord Bassford has sent us some ducks of his own shooting, and I have written to acknowledge them. Will you read my letter, please?"

Apparently there was nothing in it to excite his wrath, but he could not forego a warning.

"Don't get interested in that young man, Prissy. I do not like what I hear about him."

"I dare say you don't," she said, flushing, "coming from the source it does."

It was Vyner's turn to flush, but he kept his temper.

"I am in a position to hear things that could not possibly reach your ears. Lord Bassford does not stand well in his clubs."

"Why listen to vague London gos-

sip?" she asked, hotly. "I am more or less in his confidence, and I know his worst offense is being poor."

"Then he should not play cards."

"He doesn't," returned his advocate. "He has given it up and is living here on next to nothing in order to pay his debts. It is rather disheartening to have such tittle-tattle follow one across the ocean."

"A man's reputation is never at the mercy of tittle-tattle," answered Vyner, gravely. "See here, Priscilla. You are taking up Bassford's cause in a way that gives me the greatest alarm. Is it possible that you care for him after all I have said to you on the subject?"

"Do you expect me to share my confidence with you and—another?" she asked, scornfully.

"I had hoped you would give it to me," he said, gently, "but if you will not, you force measures upon me for your protection that I do not like to take."

Before her father came in Priscilla's imagination had favored her with a scene of reconciliation and devotion edifying to men and angels. She had left her letter open for him to read as a means of re-establishing a confidence that had been waning even before the catastrophe of his engagement, and she meant (if she could!) to promise her friendship to Mrs. Rawlston and to sob out her love and forgiveness on his breast, but the conversation had taken a turn she little expected, and this hinted threat sent the blood bounding through her veins while filial piety was tossed sky-high.

"I don't know what you mean to do," she said, angrily, "but whatever it is, my happiness is sure to be sacrificed to Mrs. Rawlston's ideas of propriety!" and she dashed out of the room more at odds with her father than ever.

With a sigh that much-harassed gentleman took up his pen and scribbled a letter to his legal adviser before he went to bed. If in the past his affections had betrayed him into weakness, his present course showed determination almost stern. The experience was bitter for them both. He believed that he was setting up barriers between her and

misfortune; she felt he was placing them between her and his love.

It was the morning of the wedding before she entirely recovered herself. The brougham that was to take them to Mrs. Rawlston's house was waiting at the door, and Vyner came to his daughter's room to suggest their starting. She was dressed, ready for his summons—a gallant little figure, pale and proud, but there was something in her father's face that broke down the pride, and drew her to him with a thrill of tenderness. Each saw the other through a medium of emotion that lifted them out of the commonplace.

Priscilla shut the door, and flung her arms around his neck.

"Whatever happens," she exclaimed, "I love you entirely! You are first and best. Kiss me, my precious one." And he kissed her with a look of happiness she never forgot.

"God bless you, my darling," he answered, "it is not at this late day I need to be told your heart is in the right place."

All through the marriage service Priscilla was as nervous as if she were herself the bride. Philip's calmness was incomprehensible to her. He seemed to regard the event as an amusing comedy to be accepted with kindly sarcasm, and yet she could not help suspecting that he also was feeling his desertion keenly. She leaned her arms on the back of a chair, and found they were shaking as in an ague; and then suddenly all feeling passed; she seemed to dissociate herself with what was passing and to become a mere spectator. At the breakfast that followed she made merry with those of the small company she happened to know, and when the bride and groom went away she fluttered the gayest good-by. Some indiscreet person stood ready with a bag of rice, and then for a moment Priscilla's temper reasserted itself.

"Take that away," she ordered, with flashing eyes. "I shall not allow my father to be made ridiculous."

As their carriage disappeared a longing for solitude and fresh air seized her,

and finding the Rawlston contingent disposed to linger, she decided to make her *adieux*, and take a spin around the park. But she counted without her host; Philip threw himself on her mercy.

"For God's sake don't leave me with all these old women, Priscilla," he entreated. "What am I to do with them? I wish they would go!"

"Open a window on their backs," she suggested, frivolously; "let your dog loose among them; tell them a naughty story! Have you no resources?"

"Stay a few minutes, there's a good girl," he begged, and reluctantly she threw down her coat and returned.

Half-hearted measures were never Priscilla's choice. What she did was done with her might. She was graciousness itself. She sought every Rawlston connection, and said what was tactful to each. She put a spice of deviltry into her jokes with the elderly gentlemen (just enough to make them twirl their mustaches, and feel the gay-dog warmth of youth flash through their veins), while to the old ladies she was pretty-mannered and submissive, till golden opinions fell to her in a shower. Finally when the last wedding guest was gone she turned to Philip.

"Can you get on without me now, Brother Philip?" she asked, mockingly.

"Less than ever," he returned, "but understand that I make no brotherly claims—not by any manner of means."

He was helping her into her coat, and making the process as prolonged as he could; it was all that stood between him and his new life of solitude.

The whole house had a look of dreary confusion; the air was oppressive with the scent of dying flowers; the formal drawing-rooms seemed even more tormental with the furniture pushed back against the walls; and Philip felt that home life had gone with his mother.

"Upon my word," he said, looking around, "I think I am more to be pitied than you. Isn't a regretted loss worse than an unwelcome gain? It all harks back to the eternal unfitness in human affairs, doesn't it? For my consolation, may I come to see you every day?"

"Twice a day," she answered, gayly, "and if I am not home you will always find Miss Goring. Who is she? She was once my governess, and is now to be my companion till my—*parents* come back." (This she said with demure impudence.) "She is a blushing maiden of fifty, ready to talk ritualism by the hour or to gush over Miss Yonge's novels."

"I see," he said, laughing. "Your veritable *alter ego*! What could I desire more? Tell me your engagements that I may time my visits so as to enjoy Miss Goring's society free from interruption."

Priscilla opened a tiny book that hung at her belt, bound in gold filigree.

"Beginning from this minute," she said, "I go from here to the railway station to meet Miss Goring—"

"Let me go with you!" exclaimed Philip.

"Young women only drive in close carriages with their fathers or brothers," she objected.

"And I am almost your brother," he ventured.

"Not by any manner of means—I have your own word for it. You asked for my list of engagements, and I have only got as far as the station." She consulted her book, and continued to read:

"Then tea at Mrs. Vanderlyn's and bridge. Dine at the Carters'. To-morrow—the fifteenth, bridge lesson at eleven. Lunch with Mrs. Nugent to play bridge. Tea at the Hoyts' for bridge—"

"Great heavens!" he interrupted. "Are you trying to turn yourself into a calculating machine? With all the pleasant things in the world waiting to be done, how can you shut yourself up for hours in stuffy rooms to play that idiot game?"

Priscilla shut her book.

"You can hardly expect me to go on when my list subjects me to rude comment," she said, pettishly.

"You needn't go on," he said. "I see my chances to cultivate Miss Goring are likely to exceed my fondest expectations."

Priscilla smiled, and recovered her temper.

"Isn't it all useless?" she said, tapping her book. "I mean the slavery of those who amuse themselves. What we want is work, and if we haven't the incentive of necessity we try to turn play into obligation."

"At all events it is less objectionable than slumming," he answered, warming to the subject. "The conceit and self-righteousness of the rich in their relation to charity——"

"Good-by, Mr. Philip," cried Priscilla, frankly bored. "Already you are mixing me up with Miss Goring. She is an incorrigible slummer, and if I don't go this moment, her train will be in at the Grand Central, and she may wander off to the East Side tenements, instead of reclaiming Priscilla Vyner from the pursuit of Mammon."

CHAPTER VI.

"Will madame please not breathe," suggested Mrs. Vanderlyn's maid, after a third unsuccessful attempt to meet the waistband of her lady's evening dress, and Mrs. Vanderlyn closed her lips resolutely, and grew red in the face with the effort to refrain, when—ting-ting-ting—went the bell of the telephone on the little table by her side; for what modern fine lady is without the consolation of that bedroom companion, so intimate, yet so discreet?

Mrs. Vanderlyn broke from the hands of her compressor, and, once more breathing freely, seated herself at the instrument.

"Who is it?" she asked. (The fashionable female voice takes on a honeyed sweetness through the 'phone!)

A voice like that of a marionette made some reply.

"You, Bassford!" (Astonishment revived the habitual cackle.) "I thought you were in the South. What brings you back? Pengordon dead! Committed suicide at Monte Carlo—how awful! Does Polly Pengordon

take it very hard? Doesn't care a hang, hey! And she made you bring her North; how tender! Oh, you came partly for remittances; cleaned out, I suppose. I believe you've been gambling again; not that it concerns me, but you might as well know that Mr. Vyner has heard tales of you, and I'm afraid you'll find a spoke in your wheel. How do I know? Peter told me."

Much harangue followed on the part of Lord Bassford.

"Of course I'm your friend, but I shan't help you in that game. I like Priscilla too much! I shall tell her plainly what a *zaurien* you are. She is dining with me to-night."

More from Bassford.

"Ah! Yes! I suppose so, if you promise not to make love to Miss Vyner. Half-past seven—and do be punctual, for we are going to the opera."

And so when half an hour later Priscilla entered Mrs. Vanderlyn's drawing-room she saw Bassford, whom she had supposed in the land of "snakes and 'gators," of oranges and early spring, talking earnestly with her hostess. She had a brief moment to recover herself, for they were at the far end of the large room, and she had not yet been announced; so murmuring something about her handkerchief she beat a hasty retreat, and while the maid looked for what she had all the time in her own hand, she tried to collect her thoughts. For three weeks she had been trying to banish the Englishman from her heart—ever since the day of her father's wedding, when she had thrown herself on his breast and promised him good faith. It was not that she believed the stories against Lord Bassford, but her father's wishes weighed with her far more than her resentful way of receiving them would imply, while the fact of his absence put her on her honor. It was a crowning piece of ill luck for a person of her impulsive temperament to fall headlong on her fate. She saw two things clearly—that Bassford was dearer to her than she knew, and that honesty required her to write to her father and tell him the truth.

Once more she made her entrance, and this time with enough noise to attract attention. Bassford dashed across the room with a cry of joy. Mrs. Vanderlyn pointed to the clock, and scolded her for being late, and Mr. Vanderlyn, who sincerely liked Priscilla, lowered the evening paper sufficiently to nod over the top.

Peter Augustus was not social by instinct. Sometimes a formal dinner party or the presence of some financial star of the first magnitude would induce him to yield habit to politeness, but as a general thing he looked upon guests as intruders whom Mrs. Vanderlyn chose to entertain for her own amusement, and his only resource was to dissociate himself from their prattle while he absorbed the money articles in all the evening papers. He had no conception of his own bad manners, but was keenly sensitive to other people's treatment of him. Fortunately, the announcement of dinner appealed to his finer feelings, for he arose to his feet, and playfully offered Priscilla his little, thin stick of an arm. She had to listen to his reproaches because she left her relish of caviare untasted, before she could catch the drift of what Lord Bassford was saying apropos of his hasty return.

"Somebody had to come back with Lady Pengordon, who was hurrying home to England to her husband's funeral, and really I was glad to leave Florida. I found the hotels so frightfully expensive," he groaned. "I assure you I had hardly enough money in my pocket to get back."

"You paid your own railroad fare!" Mrs. Vanderlyn exclaimed. "Well, you're the first Englishman I ever knew who didn't wring a pass out of somebody, even if he only wanted to go from here to Newark! From the moment your countrymen (and women) land in America they are sitting on their hind legs with a tin cup in their mouths till they've worked the market for all it is worth; and as for stopping in private houses, I believe they've a regular tramp system of letting each other know where pie's to be found for the asking."

Lord Bassford flushed angrily.

"You are rather mixed in your metaphors, and insulting to my countrymen, Mrs. Vanderlyn, though I believe you consider yourself privileged to speak your mind. Does it never occur to you that Americans are somewhat given to running amuck through Europe vulgarizing everything?"

"Oh, eat your soup!" said Mrs. Vanderlyn. "Didn't I just say you were a glorious exception?"

Priscilla gallantly threw herself into the breach, and the talk became general, but she had failed to find out the true inwardness of Lord Bassford's return.

As the clock struck eight, Mr. Vanderlyn was in the act of helping himself to a second supply of asparagus. He liked early vegetables.

"Don't be so slow, Peter," his wife complained. "We are late for the opera as it is. Oh! *You* are not going— Well, *we* are! I thought you liked 'The Huguenots.'"

Mr. Vanderlyn's bird-like claw was directing a limp piece of asparagus into his mouth, and the full irritation of his answer was lost.

"I hate all operas," he said, glaring at her; "some more than others—never said I liked any—squeak of the fiddles makes my teeth ache."

His wife's attention had wandered from his distastes back to the opera they were to see. She tapped her forehead.

"What is the word the newspapers always use to curse 'The Huguenots'?" she demanded. "It begins with *m*. I have it! Meretricious. Other operas may be dull, or trivial, or plain bad, but 'The Huguenots' is meretricious, and, that being the case, let us finish our dinner in peace."

It is a strange thing that no occupant of a parterre box at the opera house ever sees the curtain go up. It seems to be a point of fashion with them to steal in noiselessly one after another, during the entire first act, so that when the lights are turned on for the *entre acte*, the horseshoe of dismal cabins has been transformed into a galaxy of as handsome women as can be found the world

over, and the pageant of the boxes seems to interest opera-goers almost as much as the pageants of the stage.

Priscilla was impatient to be off. She loved music, and was not consoled for its loss by seeing Mr. Vanderlyn eat. Moreover, Lord Bassford had little to say, and Priscilla feared his feelings were hurt, and regretted the frankness of her hostess.

However, things mended when they were packed in the landau on their way to Thirty-ninth Street, and if Lord Bassford had been out of temper he recovered his spirits. He described his Southern trip with a graphic picturesqueness that delighted Priscilla, who liked information, and bored Mrs. Vanderlyn, who liked gossip, so that gradually the conversation was confined to the two kindred spirits, and only interspersed with comments on passing occurrences on the part of Mrs. Peter Augustus.

"Did you see who was shut up in that brougham? It was Jessie Nugent and her little Austrian. Well! she'll get herself talked about. There goes old Mrs. Trab! Her wig's right over her left ear. Do you know she won't have another woman in her opera box with her because she can't find one who doesn't make her look old by contrast. Oh, these awful trolleys—I know that one smashed our wheel! There's one advantage in being late; you don't have to get in line. Only one carriage in front of us, and it's Harriet Carter's, I declare, and your stepbrother, Rawlston, getting out. 'Love me; love my dog.' Harriet is your dog, isn't she, Prissy, and rumor does say your new mamma wouldn't object to a family quartet."

Priscilla was nearly crying with vexation.

"And I think gossip might let me and my family alone," she cried. "I am sure we have furnished them with enough excitement for one season."

Mrs. Vanderlyn was conveniently deaf while she gave up her tickets and mounted the stairs on her way to her box.

Priscilla quickly threw off her wraps,

and, while waiting for Mrs. Vanderlyn to be assisted by the maid in attendance, she and Bassford stood at the back of the box looking through the gloom of the great theatre at the brilliantly lighted stage.

Few things are more impressive than the quiet of a vast audience; it gives the effect of overwhelming appreciation, of the unity of sympathy that has brought them together; and this is especially true when viewed through a semi-darkness that destroys individual expression.

The scene was still set for the first act of "The Huguenots," and down the broad flight of stairs came Madame Fritz Scheff in her page's dress of blue and silver, bearing her queen's letter to the tenor—a lumpish man in sad-colored garments—and then—oh, joy!—through the house rang out the fresh young notes of that charming voice in the famous song.

Little cold creeps of pleasure thrilled Priscilla; they seemed gently to stir her hair and run down the back of her neck, and quite unconsciously she laid her hand on Bassford's arm, and exclaimed:

"How delicious!"

She was bitterly ashamed of her impulsiveness when she found her hand seized and carried to his lips, and to add to her confusion she was by no means sure that Mrs. Peter Augustus had not taken in the whole occurrence through a crack in the curtain that separated them from the anteroom.

That lady now came forward, and seated herself with noisy rustling, while the seams of her satin dress creaked above the music. Bassford slid into the chair behind Priscilla, and began a low-voiced conversation that could reach no ear but hers.

"You haven't yet given me a genuine word of welcome," was his reproach. "Can't you guess why I've come?"

"Oh, yes!" she said, demurely. "You told us yourself. Something to do with expenses or remittances. How sorry you must have been to leave the Ingots and beautiful Lady Pengordon."

Bassford was sitting so close behind her that when she turned to say this

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her hair brushed his cheek. He caught his breath.

"I came," he said, "because the thud of the wheels as they carried me South said 'Priscilla,' and the birds sang it in the trees, and my own heart whispered it all day long. Do you mind my telling you so?"

"Oh, yes!" she said. "Of course I mind! You mustn't say these things. I am forbidden to listen to you."

"Would you listen if you were not forbidden?" he demanded.

"How do I know? perhaps I might! Why make my duty more difficult, Lord Bassford?"

"Is it difficult, Priscilla?" very gently.

"It is hard to find my judgment at variance with my father's," she answered. "He has heard much of you that makes him discourage any intimacy between us. I tell you this frankly, because I should like you to convince him of your sincerity, as you have me. I understand, but it is natural that he should not. In a word—how shall I say it?—you must gain his confidence before you ask—" She stopped, embarrassed.

"For your love," he concluded for her, with a sigh. "My dear little girl, love isn't given or withheld at any one's bidding. If you love me you will not torture me to please your father—if you do not, why should I care what he thinks!"

"But I care what he thinks," she said, with spirit, "and you have no right to make it a test of my liking for you."

"No one was talking of liking," he said, gloomily. "I do right to make it a test of love. If he chooses to rake up the past he will find plenty in my life—in any young man's life—that isn't exactly written about in Sunday-school books, but it is pretty hard if a fellow can't be sorry and begin over again. I told you I had been an awful ass about money, and wasted a lot at cards and things, and old habits are hard to break, but I am pulling myself together, and I had counted on your help, my darling."

"I'm but a broken reed to lean on,"

she said, sadly. "I am spoilt, and willful, and extravagant. I fear I need help quite as much as you."

It never occurred to Priscilla that her help could be of a more material character than the tender influence every good woman thinks she exerts over the man she loves, and Bassford was almost sincere. In moments like this he loved her for herself, and blessed his stars that a woman who so thoroughly satisfied his taste should not be forbidden to him through poverty.

"You don't appreciate the power you have over me," he began, eagerly. "As long as I am near you I keep straight, and the— Oh! pshaw!" for as he spoke the curtain went down, and the house, now bright as noonday, broke into the babble of a vast reception.

The door of the box opened to admit an influx of men, and Mrs. Vanderlyn's pent-up spirits found vent in speech.

"If I had an admirer with earrings and a ruff like M. Scotti, to say nothing of a ballet and a private barge on tap, I'd love him instead of the thick-legged person in purple who always seems a little off the key!" she remarked to Philip Rawlston, who had just come in.

"But the ballet and barge haven't come into the tragedy yet, Mrs. Vanderlyn," said Rawlston, laughing. "The lady's soul is too great to fall to earrings and ruff alone."

"Note that, Bassford," cried Mrs. Péter, to his retreating figure, "and don't trust to your coronet only when you go courting!"

The gentleman addressed cast a revengeful glance at her as he hurried to the corridor. It was hard enough to have to surrender his place behind Priscilla at a crucial moment, without the added annoyance of providing repartees to Mrs. Vanderlyn's gibes.

As he paced up and down outside he pondered the situation with mixed feelings. He was sure he had made an impression on Priscilla, and he believed a few more arguments might have extorted some kind of a promise from her, but he knew enough of women to appreciate that such a conversation could not be renewed at will. There had been

an undercurrent of emotion on the girl's part that he despaired of arousing again in the noise and chatter that always surrounded Mrs. Vanderlyn, and he saw plainly that his chance was over for that night.

In the meanwhile, the coveted chair behind Priscilla was taken by her latest conquest, Mr. Dicky McMann, a Nimrod of the hunting field. The apotheosis of the horse had been the main-spring of his being from the time he rode his father's walking-stick till now, when possessed of two hunters and as many polo ponies, he felt he could hold his own among the sporting spirits of Willowbrook. But his equine favorites had been lately overridden by his passion for Miss Vyner. Unsuspected by her, the mere vision of her riding beside her father in the park, was enough to unnerve Dicky's mighty bridle arm, and send his courage oozing out of the spurs on his heels. So maudlin and so modest is the callow love of youth.

To-night he meant to tell her that she was the most beautiful woman in the house, but before he had got to the preliminary blush, Philip Rawlston seated himself between her and Mrs. Vanderlyn, and announced himself as the bearer of a message to Priscilla from the Carters, to beg her to go with them to Willowbrook the next day. The programme, he explained, was to lunch at the club, and follow the hunt in a light wagon along the roads. Priscilla was more than willing to go, inasmuch as lunching at the club was gayer than lunching alone with Miss Goring in town, but she drew the line at following in a cart.

"You have horses down there, Philip. Can't you lend me a mount?" she asked, with a friendliness that pleased and pained him at the same moment.

"Oh, Miss Vyner!" cried Dicky, finding speech, "take one of my horses. There's Apollyon and The Smasher, and Nimble and Nobby; any one of them would carry you sweetly!"

Philip waited till he finished his sentence before ignoring his prattle.

"Do you propose hunting?" he asked Priscilla, with anxiety, knowing the

next day's run was over a particularly rough country.

"Why not?" she asked, resenting the disapprobation in his tone. "Papa and I hunted all one winter at Pau."

"But he was with you to take the responsibility," began Philip, "whereas now——"

"I shall take it for myself!" she answered, crossly. "Thank you very much, Mr. McMann, I will ride The Smasher with pleasure."

"For Heaven's sake, Priscilla," pleaded Rawlston, "ride one of my horses if you will be so foolish. My gray will carry you over anything. You owe it to Mr. Vyner to take care of yourself."

To tell the truth, Priscilla was already repenting her rash resolve. She was overstrung, and nervously unhappy over her interview with Bassford, and Philip's attitude of brotherly adviser made her resentful with the fractiousness of a naughty child. It pleased her to frighten herself in order to punish him. She decided, however, that she would ride Philip's gray—if she broke its knees it was pleasanter to know it was all in the family—and Dicky McMann was almost reduced to tears.

As the curtain went up, Philip left her, with many misgivings and only one small comfort—namely, that if she could stick to her saddle the gray would carry her through and over anything.

In the corridor he ran across Bassford, so absorbed in his own thoughts that he might have passed him unnoticed.

"You are missing some good singing," said Philip. "Sembrich is in great voice to-night."

But Bassford only nodded gloomily. Sembrich, and Gadske, and the associated talent of all the opera company might pour out their melody to empty seats for all he cared. He was in bad temper with himself. He had nearly forced an admission from Priscilla, and by choosing his time stupidly he had failed at the point of success.

Philip passed on, taking from his pocket a letter that had been given to him as he left his house, and hesitating

at the door of Mrs. Carter's box as to whether he should open it, but he decided against it, for he dropped it back, and took his place beside his hostess. Virtue was quickly rewarded in this one case, for at the end of the third act Mrs. Carter went home, taking her other companions with her, and Rawlston was left in solitary possession of the box. He went into the ante-room, pulling the curtain behind him, turned on the light, and standing under it broke the seal of his mother's letter. It was in answer to one he had written most unwillingly, but of vital interest to him.

CITY OF MEXICO, March 13th.

Does our whereabouts surprise you, my dear boy? Our coming here was a sudden resolve due to the hospitality of our friends, the Browns, with their private car. It is quite the most novel expedition I have ever made, but my pleasure is spoiled by my alarm at the effect this altitude (7,500 feet) is having on my husband's heart. He never suspected any weakness and does not realize the danger now, though he is terribly oppressed. Instead of hurrying away he insists upon waiting for our friends, upon the plea that being forlorn he will travel home more comfortably in their car.

Your last letter followed me here. I see I forced your confidence in regard to Priscilla by my direct and indiscreet questions, but I need not apologize for what you must know came from too much love.

Oh! the pity of it! that you, with your great heart and generous nature, should love a woman incapable of appreciating you. I can hear you rustle the paper with fury at my daring to call you great and generous and Priscilla unappreciative, and yet so it is.

Your news was no news to me, for I have suspected that you cared for her since the night of the Ingots' ball, when you came to my room, and in my selfishness I talked of my own happiness instead of yours. But, dear Phil, your happiness is as dear to me as my life, and if I can please you by loving Priscilla, I will try, only you must not expect me to help her ruin your life and my husband's by marrying Lord Bassford.

Never again contrast yourself with him to your own disadvantage—you say he is handsome, that he has a charm of voice and manner, and many accomplishments that appeal to all women—and I say that you are twice the man he is, and that your dear face is stamped with expression that is utterly lacking in his English stolidity.

When Priscilla wakes from this dream—for, mark my words, she will not marry him—her eyes may be opened to her true happiness.

Next week we turn our faces homeward. My greatest joy in coming back is the knowledge that you and my husband are friends.

Ever yours,
K. V.

"She is not the first hen who has liked her own ugly duckling," said Philip to himself, "but a little flattery even from one's mother is wonderfully consoling." And he, too, left the Huguenots to their fate.

CHAPTER VII.

It was the twenty-third of March, the time when the warrior month is wont to sue for peace, but this year for two weeks the south winds had blown gently, wooing the trees to bud and the grass to cover the bare shoulders of shameless earth.

The weather-wise predicted a blight in April as the penalty of so precocious a spring, but that did not trouble the small company of whom we are writing—they like everything out of season, from nectarines in January to frost in May, and looked upon a St. Patrick's summer in March as a *fête* of Providence.

Priscilla, buttoned from throat to heels in a long covert coat over her habit, came driving down Thirty-fourth Street the morning in question in company with her companion, Miss Goring. Although they arrived in ample time, the last boat for the Willowbrook train had given a warning snort before Miss Goring was ready to consign Priscilla to Mrs. Carter's charge, so many were her injunctions as to care of life and limb, and precautions against taking cold.

Miss Goring had done a good deal of what she called horseback riding in her youth, when she wore a soft, black hat with a plume, and a floating skirt, weighted with pennies to keep it from exhibiting *her limbs* (legs only bore this relation to the human trunk) and consequently she found the modern masculine dress inexpressibly shocking. The only excuse for such a costume

was a kind of hard riding more unfeminine than the dress itself.

"I hope you will come back safely, my dear," she said, kissing Priscilla's reluctant cheek. "I don't see how you keep on your horse at all with no pommel convenient to your hand, and your saddle covered with shiny pigskin; really, you might as well be sitting bare-back for any hold you have—better, perhaps, for I am sure the horse's fur wouldn't be half so slippery."

Priscilla tried to allay her fears with soothing words. Why waste arguments on a person who called a horse's coat his fur?

Quite a party was assembled on the boat. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Carter and Priscilla, were Philip, Dicky McMann and Lord Bassford—the latter, thanks to Miss Vyner's repudiation of The Smasher, had been offered that accomplished animal for the run; an offer he accepted with avidity, as he hoped it might give him some hours in Priscilla's society, besides affording him an opportunity of showing his New York friends some really superior riding.

Luck was against him with Priscilla. Both she and Philip had had letters from their respective parents, and a very intimate conversation went on in the train in regard to Mr. Vyner's health. Philip was seriously alarmed, and confessed to having telegraphed to his mother the night before to take no risks, but start for home at once; and while the girl was grateful for his interest and prompt action, she could not take the same view of the case. She had often heard of mountain sickness, and she supposed even a comparatively low elevation might produce discomfort that might seem distressing, but she knew her father was sensible about his health, and she assured Philip she was not worried; and he, glad that she should be spared anxiety, affected to fall into her views.

The talk wandered to her preparations for the return—the removal of Mrs. Vyner's most cherished belongings to her husband's home, and a consulting of Philip's superior experience of her tastes. How admirable she seemed to

Rawlston, struggling between duty and inclination, and coming out triumphant! How she must hate the thought of welcoming her stepmother! And then with a sigh he told himself that all her suffering might be saved if only he were more worthy her acceptance—if he were like Bassford, handsome, and romantic, and with such extraneous advantages as a title and estates dating back to the Tudors. Not that Philip attached much importance to such things himself, but he was a large-minded man, and understood the value of the beautiful in a material sense.

With his soul in his eyes he looked down at the girl beside him, only to find her eyes in turn fixed upon Bassford. Was there ever such a tender line of cheek and chin, or such velvet rose of complexion! With magnificent courage he glanced at his own face in the car mirror, and almost laughed at what he saw, for the mirror was of a waggish disposition and gave him back his features with innovations. He thought of Nydia's song of the rose:

"The Wind and the Beam loved the Rose,
And the Rose loved one;
For who recks the wind where it blows,
Or loves not the sun?"

And as he looked at his rival, a curve of the road brought a flood of sunshine through the car window, turning his blond, curly head to gold, and touching the brown and red of his cheek with a deeper glow.

"Willowbrook!" called out the brakeman, and Philip was glad, for the wheels had been grinding out the words of the poem in a maddening manner, and their final squeak said, plainly:

"Who dreamt that the Wind had a soul
In its mournful sighs?"

Philip gave himself an angry shake. "Here we are," he cried. "May I drive you over to the club, Mrs. Carter? Mr. McMann is driving Miss Vyner."

Luncheon was but a Barmecide feast to those who meant to follow the hounds, but the Carters found the clubhouse hospitality most refreshing. The matronly Harriet seldom trusted her-

self on horseback, and saw quite enough of a run from the comparative safety of country roads, when she could persuade her good Bobby to drive her himself.

The meet was at Oaklands school-house, a distance of several miles, and Philip sent his horses ahead to await them there. He mounted Priscilla on a steady pony for the short ride, and rode himself a hack he kept for the purpose.

It was a glorious day, mild and brilliant, with a smell of teeming earth and grass, and a twitter of busy birds in the trees. Now and again a faint sea breeze swept over the plains, suggesting the nearness of the unseen ocean, and bringing with it the feeling of longing and hope that seems inseparable from the promise of the spring.

Philip and Priscilla reined in their horses to let the Carters precede them, and then jogged on in Darby and Joan fashion. The girl sat her pony easily and loosely, and Philip saw with relief that she knew what she was about. He was giving her some account of the gray's peculiarities, and how best to manage him, when they were overtaken by Lord Bassford and Dicky McMann, and the four proceeded leisurely along the dusty roads with an occasional canter. At the intersection of a lane, Mrs. Nugent turned in ahead of them. She had opened her house at Willowbrook for the hunting season, and considered herself the most daring of riders, though her interest in the sport consisted in arriving at the meet in hot haste, mounting with all the fuss of a riding-school miss, taking a few fences, and trotting home along the roads. She was in her habit, perched high on the driving seat of a yellow, two-wheeled cart, and was sending her big chestnut along at a pace that made her tiny groom shake in his boots.

"Where is her Austrian?" asked Dicky McMann, and Bassford silently pointed farther down the road to where a pink-coated horseman was riding with his head craned over his shoulder, watching the approach of his divinity on wheels.

"Look at the expression of his back," said Philip. "Did you ever see anything so ardent in color and pose!"

Now Dicky McMann hated the pretty widow, who made use of his horses and snubbed himself.

"It's board and lodging to be *au mieux* with a lady who has a house at Willowbrook in the season," he said, spitefully, but Priscilla challenged the slur.

"You know perfectly well, Mr. McMann, that Mrs. Nugent never has men staying in her house unless she is having women as well. It was horrid of you to say that!"

"Did I say she had them alone?" he asked, sulkily. "All I said was that it is convenient to Von Geltze to have the run of his teeth there."

"And what may that extraordinary slang mean?" she demanded, really puzzled.

"Free grub," he answered, "snacks and drinks for nothing. Oh, come now, Miss Vyner, you knew what I meant; you're just chaffing."

Bassford was fussing with his bridle, but he looked up, and observed, carelessly:

"I didn't think Mrs. Nugent was one of your matrimonial prizes; I had supposed it a plain case of love on the part of Von Geltze."

Priscilla felt a wave of annoyance.

"What a sordid point of view! If you mean plainly how much money has Mrs. Nugent, I am sure Mr. McMann will oblige you with the secrets of her bank account."

"You are awfully down on me to-day," Dicky complained; but being a simple soul, and that strange anomaly, a male gossip, he began with his next breath to give the required information.

"Mrs. Nugent must have about twenty-five thousand a year from her father's estate, and something from Nugent, though they say he went through nearly everything before he died. She will get more when her mother skips!"

Priscilla glanced at Philip. He was utterly detached from the conversation, looking toward the distant Berkeley

hills. And then she looked at Bassford, and to her comfort she saw a look of contempt on his face. For a minute—just a little minute—she had feared he might care about American fortunes. In her relief she managed to lag behind the others, and give him a chance to ride with her, and though their conversation was only about English hunting as opposed to ours, it was pleasant to be out of earshot.

At this point they crossed the railroad track and trotted through the village street, and then pulled their horses down to a walk as they came to their first and only hill before reaching the schoolhouse.

The road was now crowded with all sorts of light traps, nearly all driven by women. Grooms were leading sheeted hunters, many of them nervous, thoroughbred creatures, laying back their ears and showing the whites of their eyes as the carriages pressed them too closely; and there were stable boys riding their masters' horses, who fretted under the weight of heavy hands holding them so hard; while to add to the confusion, four little boys (lately escaped from school) sat on the topmost rail of the fence, and took careful and accurate aim with pea-shooters at the tails of the most skittish horses.

The party now reached the top of the hill, which commanded a view of the meet, a scene quaintly suggestive of old-time sporting prints. Before them lay a round duck pond, shaded by two enormous willow trees, the last survivors of a circle that had once adorned its banks, and back of this the ugly, yellow schoolhouse with its flag pole.

A dozen people were already assembled, a few of the men in dark coats, but the greater part in pink, adding splashes of color to the landscape as they moved restlessly about; and there were two smartly turned out women under the willows, whose calmness excited admiration in Priscilla's novice heart.

Presently the master came trotting up on his big hunter, and at his arrival, the hounds, who had been awaiting him at a little distance from all the excitement, appeared around the border of the pond

under the escort of the pink-coated, velvet-capped whips. The pack traveled so closely they looked like a moving mass of brown and white interspersed with swaying tails.

Priscilla turned to her companions to point out the pretty picture as it repeated itself in the mirror of the pond, but they were all too busy to attend to her. Philip was looking for their horses, Bassford examining his girths, while Dicky McMann was riding Apollyon slowly up and down before a reporter for *The Sportsman*, hoping some especial insertion might be made of his favorite in its next issue.

Then Philip came and hurried her to the other side of the crowd of carriages, where their horses were waiting, and she was scarcely settled in her saddle when a flutter of excitement and a cloud of dust showed that the hounds had thrown off, and Philip jammed down his hat, and cried "Come on" before she could realize the fun had begun.

Dashing past the left bank of the pond, they soon overtook the rest of the field, and saw the hounds streaming on over a bad bit of broken ground to a post-and-rail fence ahead, and then in a flash she and Philip were over, and she drew a deep breath, and looked about for Bassford. He and The Smasher had settled down to work, taking their jumps quietly, as became such kindred spirits, but before long Priscilla began to suspect that Philip's horse was inclined to rush his fences, and was only compelled to a semblance of steadiness by the light hands that restrained him. The good judgment of the rider was making the best of an indifferent mount, and with a qualm of compunction the girl remembered that the horse Philip was riding was a new and almost untried purchase, and that she was on his favorite, the gray.

With Lord Bassford, hunting seemed an every-man-for-himself game in which sentiment played no part. Priscilla's very creditable performance excited no further admiration than an encouraging wave of his hand when he occasionally turned his head to see whether she had come safely over a stiff jump. Perhaps

he reasoned that if Rawlston chose to stick to her side like a burr, playing Providence to the gray, there was no occasion for another man to spoil his run.

At the end of fifteen minutes they were rushing through the roughest kind of a field that terminated in a five-rail fence perched on a low bank. The hounds were making for the very middle, and Philip, glancing at Priscilla, thought he detected an anxious look. On their left was another field partially separated by hurdles, and in that the fence was on level ground.

"To the left," cried Philip, leading the way through a gap in the hurdles, and Priscilla obediently turned the gray after his stable mate.

They were going a little north of west, and the rays of the afternoon sun were full in their eyes as they approached their jump, Philip a little in advance. Priscilla had the gray well in hand, and as she slowed him down she saw to her horror a line of barbed wire about two feet inside the post-and-rail fence. Philip, who was slightly shortsighted, was evidently unconscious of the danger.

"Wire," she shouted, at the top of her lungs, but the wind carried away the word, though the cry reached his ears and served to distract his attention at the critical moment. With a rush the young horse struck the wire, tearing his chest and flinging Philip clean over into the farther lot, where he lay in a heap, partly on his left side.

In despair, Priscilla looked for her late companions, but by this time they were well away to the right, and every second put more and more distance between them and her. She had made up her mind to dismount and tie her horse to a hurdle, when suddenly she saw two men coming toward her from the field where Philip lay, and with a cry of relief she slipped from her saddle, shouting to the men as she did so. One—a mere boy—ran to her, while the elder man approached Philip. Priscilla threw her bridle into the boy's hand, and, scrambling through the fence, reached Philip first. His face was partly hidden,

and as she tried to raise his head she saw a little blood oozing from his lips, and her heart turned sick.

"He has cut his mouth," she said, looking for encouragement into the face of the laborer, who had now come up. "He doesn't look badly hurt, does he?" Her voice was beseeching.

The man shook his head.

"Only the doctor can tell you that, ma'am," he said, kindly. "I've seen a power of these young fellows throwed, and some ain't a penny the worse, and some bees kilt entirely. Let me at him, miss."

He rolled Philip on his back, and loosened his stock, but the change of position seemed to choke him, and a sort of tremor passed over him that terrified Priscilla. She threw herself on the ground, and lifted his head on her knees.

"Raise him a little more," she said to the man. "See, I can brace my back against the fence, and then I can hold him easily."

"Better let him lie, lady," said the man. "I guess he does be hurt in his in'ards. I'll step over to my barn and hitch the horse to the spring cart, and I'll carry him home for you."

He started off at a run, calling to his son to catch the injured horse if he could, and fetch him along with the gray.

Priscilla watched their retreating backs with a sinking heart. She didn't dare to think what might happen before they returned. In times like this the crowning misery is waiting.

Philip's breathing seemed labored, and from time to time he moaned. The girl pushed up his cuff and laid her fingers on his wrist—the pulse seemed strong to her, and she took a momentary comfort. His wrist was crossed by an ugly scar, also acquired in her service, she thought, bitterly—for with a kind of exaggerated self-reproach she chose to attribute the present accident to her obstinate determination to hunt when Philip had begged her to give it up.

Another tremor passed over the young man's frame, renewing the girl's

fears. She was overwrought to the last degree, shaking with excitement, dreading what she dared not name. She was afraid to look down on his face and afraid to look away. Irresistibly her mind flew to his mother. If—no, she couldn't even put it into thoughts—but if it did happen, how could she tell her? What an awful ending to her new happiness! Why do people who love each other ever separate, she asked herself. Oh! to have her father home once more; nothing would be quite so pitiful if only he could come. And then a cold, faint wind blew against her cheek, and quite distinctly his voice—her father's voice—said: "Priscilla."

The girl gave a loud cry, and looked around upon the empty fields. No creature was in sight, but the cry and the movement brought a faint color into Philip's lips. He opened his eyes, looked at her with an expressionless stare, and relapsed into unconsciousness.

How long she waited she never knew—possibly half an hour—but she remembered it as a dreary stretch of misery, and when she saw the men coming, instead of being glad, she felt afraid to face the next steps in the programme of horrors. Together they lifted Philip into the cart on a bed of hay covered with an old horse blanket, and once more Priscilla took her place with his head in her lap.

"To the club," she said, and the men drove slowly toward the road.

Once on the highway they passed plenty of wagons. Some were great covered drays full of garden truck on their way to the New York market, some were country carryalls driven by farmers' wives, but no one appeared who took any interest in her misfortunes beyond a passing stare.

At last, when they were within two miles of their destination, she saw Mrs. Nugent and Von Geltze coming slowly down a crossroad, and her heart beat quick with joy as she recognized a familiar face. She stopped the wagon and waited, and Mrs. Nugent, putting her horse at a trot, came quickly to her side. A few questions made the story clear,

and the real kindness of the flighty lady showed itself.

"Take him to my house," she said, "and Mr. Von Geltze can go back to town if we need more room for nurses. I have only two girls staying with me, and I can turn them out to-morrow if necessary. I am sure Mr. Von Geltze will ride on ahead now, and tell my servants to telephone for all the doctors in the neighborhood. We shall be sure to get help from some of them. Cheer up, Priscilla. When people are unconscious like this it usually means only a slight concussion of the brain that soon passes. I dare say by dinner time he will be quite himself."

Priscilla said nothing of the hemorrhage that followed the fall, but she remembered it with dread, and could not take her friend's cheerful view of his condition. Still, she must have felt relieved, for she began to cry quietly and luxuriously, showing that the tension of self-reliance was over, and by the time they reached Mrs. Nugent's door her nerves were in good working order.

Strong arms carried Philip to his bedroom on the ground floor, and in less time than they dared to hope a doctor appeared on the scene and the door was shut.

Few are so fortunate as never to have awaited a friend's sentence from a doctor's lips. Hitherto in Priscilla's happy experience she had never even had to bear suspense, and the delay seemed unbearable.

At last Von Geltze came into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Nugent was making tea and Priscilla pacing the floor like a caged tigress, and told his news.

"A broken rib has pierced the lung," he said in his strange accent. "My dear lady, give me one long cup of tea."

CHAPTER VIII.

"That was a good run on a good horse," said Bassford, throwing himself off The Smasher and nodding his thanks to Dicky.

But Dicky hardly heard; he was giving his head groom most particular orders in regard to Apollyon. The performances of his favorite that day had placed him among the champions of the field and Dicky would brook no neglect of such a prize.

So Bassford strolled into the clubhouse, while his imagination pictured the immediate refreshment of a whiskey-and-soda of abnormal length and coldness, and almost collided with Mrs. Carter hastening from the telephone.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a groan, "such an awful thing has happened! Mr. Rawlston has had a very bad fall and they have taken him to Mrs. Nugent's. Miss Vyner has just telephoned that she could not leave till she knew he was out of danger, and to beg us to tell her people and his."

"Didn't she say how badly he was hurt?" asked Bassford, with anxiety.

"She said he had concussion of the brain and something wrong with his chest—and you call this sport!" she wound up with a sickly smile.

Now Bassford was but mortal, and many things were pressing—among others, time, and a thirst like a five-years' drought, and a shower, and clean linen, and the six o'clock train and a dinner engagement—and so at the risk of being thought hard-hearted he left Mrs. Carter with an abruptness she characterized as rude. They didn't even take the same train to town, for the Carters were exact people and caught the train they went for, and by doing so had the discomfort of listening to Miss Goring's laments about Priscilla's determination to stop overnight, and of driving to Rawlston's house and breaking the news of his accident to his servants; whereas Bassford, who missed the train, drove to the next station and caught the express and arrived in town in excellent temper with himself and the world.

At dinner that evening he overheard a conversation between Mr. Vanderlyn and another Wall Street magnate that set his brain on fire.

"By the way," said Mr. Vanderlyn, "did you know it was practically all up

with Vyner? I heard from Henry Brown yesterday, who has been down in Mexico with his car—had the Vyners with him—high altitude developed heart trouble—must have been lurking—Brown says he doubts whether he can get him home alive—deuced hard on the new wife!"

"Why in thunder didn't they come away?" asked the friend. "It seems asinine to wait to let the man die."

"It seemed risky to move him at first," answered Mr. Vanderlyn. "They are on their way home now."

"Will his death affect stocks?" asked the friend, hitching up his chair and speaking in an eager voice.

"No," said Mr. Vanderlyn, contemptuously. "Why, Vyner hasn't any great holdings—don't believe, all told, his investments will touch eight millions."

"I had supposed him richer," said the friend, sadly.

Eight millions!

Bassford said it over to himself, he turned it into pounds, he invested it in governments and then in industrials, and then in railways, and then he rebuilt Bassingdean, and last of all he paid his debts, and saw in his mind's eye his handsome self—George Charles Mowbray Dean, thirteenth Viscount Bassford—restored to that popularity which a weak memory for overdue notes had seriously endangered. His eyes were shining and his face was pale; if he could have seen himself the tense look of his features would have shocked him.

So great was his abstraction that he followed the other men to the drawing-room quite mechanically and sank down on a far-off sofa beside Mrs. Vanderlyn without addressing a word to that lady.

"Well! What do you want of me?" she demanded. "You plump yourself down beside me without saying by your leave, or damn your soul, or anything else polite, and expect me to fancy your manners. You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Something much stranger," he said. "I have seen hope coming my way."

"You have had encouraging letters

from your agent at home?" she asked, only half interested.

Bassford had made his avowal of hope without considering how impossible it was to lay bare its foundations.

After all, Mrs. Vanderlyn was right; his anticipations were ghostly, for they could only come to him through death. So he let her suppose his strange mood was the consequence of his encouraging mail, and warded off further questions by giving her an account of Philip's accident. He declared a drag hunt with its hard riding was no place for women and wound up with a storm of abuse for any man who could use wire in a hunting country.

"It seems to me you let Phil Rawlston do you out of a soft thing with Priscilla," said Mrs. Vanderlyn. "Why didn't you sacrifice a bone or two to her compassion, and you might have been engaged to her this minute, and in the way of helping her to spend some of Papa Vyner's millions, for by all accounts he's dying."

Bassford flushed as the secrets of his heart were thus presented to him through his companion's plain speech.

"If such a sorrow is waiting for Miss Vyner," he said, gently, "I am afraid there would be little place in her regard for any one her father disapproved."

He hated the hypocrisy of the speech, but how could he give his confidence to this feather-brained person, and besides—as he told himself again and again—he loved Priscilla Vyner.

"I am going down to Willowbrook by an early train to-morrow," he continued, "to see about Rawlston. He has regained consciousness and is fretting about his mail, and Mrs. Nugent telephoned to me just before I came here, asking me to attend to it for him. Have you any commands?"

"Oh, no!" she said, lightly. "I don't suppose any one minds much about Mr. Rawlston except perhaps his mother."

Any one in Mrs. Vanderlyn's vocabulary meant the few in her little company who distinguished each other as worthy of notice, while the rest of the outside world served as audience to their polite comedy.

The next morning Lord Bassford was driving over the Willowbrook plains by ten o'clock, and drew up in front of Mrs. Nugent's door just as a great surgeon from town was arriving in company with the local practitioner who had been the first to respond to the summons the day before.

The doctors went at once to Philip's room, and Lord Bassford was shown by the servant into a pretty chintz-covered parlor, sweet with hothouse spring flowers—daffodils, and jonquils, and early violets. The day was cooler than the preceding one, and the wood fire was pleasant after a drive through the fresh morning air.

The daily papers lay neatly folded on a low wicker table by the fireplace, but Bassford could afford to ignore them; he had searched their columns in the train and knew that for once an item of news had escaped the reporters. Philip's accident was fully chronicled, but Mr. Vyner's illness was not even touched upon. Bassford passionately desired to make his appeal to Priscilla before the coming sorrow should overwhelm her, and circumstances had played into his hands. She was separated from her friends, the papers were innocuous, Philip's mail was safe in his pocket and not likely to be asked for till after the doctors had left.

In a few moments the servant returned to say that Mrs. Nugent had driven to the station with some guests who were leaving by train, but Miss Vyner would be with his lordship in a moment, and almost before the words were spoken she came.

Some women look pinched and seamed by anxiety; Priscilla looked only delicately fragile. The violet shadows under her eyes made them larger and the loss of color seemed to shrink the outline of her face. She looked like an unhappy child.

"Is he so very ill?" burst from Bassford's lips.

"I don't think so," she said, plaintively, "but we felt we must run no risk. McBride is only here to make sure the Willowbrook man is right in his diagnosis, but I can't be happy till

I know there is no danger. It was nice of you to come to us," she added, gratefully.

"My dearest," he answered, standing close beside her chair, "why won't you understand that your unhappiness is mine? What can I say to comfort you—to make you realize my love for you? If you would only give me the right to take care of you now and always!"

"But I told you I cared," began Priscilla, haltingly. "The other night, at the opera, I said that if you could win papa, you could—oh! what more is there to say?" she asked.

"Listen," he answered. "I am putting my soul in your hands. Marry me and I shall hold my own among men—turn me adrift, and I shall go to perdition."

"You are threatening me!" she exclaimed, coloring with indignation.

"Threatening?" he repeated.

"With your moral suicide," she answered. "What hope is there of happiness for us if my love is all that holds you from wrecking your life?"

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "Life without you is simply too dreary to face, but I agree with you—it is a coward's part to throw it away!"

He took a restless turn up and down the room and came back to her side.

"Priscilla," he said, "I swear to you, whether you marry me or not, I will never again touch a card. Oh! don't be small-minded," he added, seeing her unsatisfied look, "I cannot go over a list of the ways in which a man can risk his money and his morals, but I am making you a solemn promise never to gamble again, so help me God, and I am asking no return."

At last he had touched the right chord. She looked up in his face and said, quite simply:

"That is all papa wants. You know I love you," and for ten minutes as pretty a love scene went on as the chaste mirrors of Mrs. Nugent's walls were ever likely to witness.

The sound of wheels on the gravel outside brought Priscilla to a sense of things mundane.

"Our engagement must be a secret,"

she whispered. "Papa has been ill and may not be able to talk it over with you for a few days, but when he knows what you have promised me he will not stand in the way of our happiness."

"Bless you, my darling, for trusting me," said the young man, with real emotion. "If anything could add to my admiration for you it would be this."

Bassford was not a restrained lover, and moreover he was a very happy, very triumphant man. His enthusiasm was by no means confined to words, and such being the case the abrupt opening of the parlor door was, to say the least, inopportune. Mrs. Nugent and Dr. McBride entered.

After all, there was not much to see, only Priscilla replacing a hairpin and Lord Bassford blowing his nose, but Dr. McBride, whose professional training made him keen to observe, had surprised a more concentrated *tableau* through the crack of the door, and drew his own conclusions.

Questions in regard to Philip were rapidly put and answered. McBride did not consider him in danger at the moment, and only problematically in the future. There were always possibilities attending an injury to the lung that might give trouble—an abscess might form, and septicæmia ensue, but he hoped for no complications.

Bassford drew a package of letters and papers from his pocket and handed them to the doctor.

"I brought Rawlston's mail," he said. "Is it safe to give it to him?"

McBride hesitated and then selected half a dozen telegrams.

"I'll take him these," he said, "as he keeps asking for them. He has a good deal of temperature, and telegrams are less exhausting to read than letters. I must catch the next train, Mrs. Nugent, so I will say good-by to you now."

A few steps brought him to a wing of the house where Philip was lodged. A white-capped young woman was repacking the surgeon's bag, the sun crept through the half-closed shutters, and the patient in his narrow brass bed looked peaceful, almost happy.

Through the long hours of pain and

fever Philip had been beguiled by a blessed vision that came and went again and again, especially when he was drowsy, so that he grew cunning and wooed it back by trying to sleep. He thought he was lying with his head in Priscilla's lap and her cool hands stroked his forehead and touched his wrist, and when he called her she seemed to melt away. She had just vanished for the fiftieth time and Philip had given a decidedly cross sigh, when the doctor's voice roused him to full consciousness.

"Here is your mail, Mr. Rawlston. It consists chiefly in a pile of telegrams, but if I were you I should not worry myself just now with any unnecessary business."

Philip hardly heard him. He was tearing open the envelopes and devouring the contents before the doctor had finished speaking. He took them up haphazard and read them as they came.

CITY OF MEXICO, March 20th, 6 P. M.

Leaving for home this evening. Frederick desperately ill. Prepare Priscilla for worst.

KATHERINE VYNER.

Four days old! Where had it been all this time? He looked at the envelope and saw that the number of the house was wrong. His mother's figures were apt to be poor and the Spanish reading at fault.

EAGLE PASS, March 22d, 11:30 A. M.

No hope. K. V.

NEW ORLEANS, March 24th, 7 A. M.

Mr. Vyner died on my car at midnight. Cannot you join your mother at Washington?

HENRY BROWN.

There were more; at every pause on the journey his mother had sent him some message of distress, and he was lying a helpless wreck, unable to do anything for those he loved.

Dr. McBride had moved to a far-off corner with the amiable intention of not seeming to watch his patient while reading the dispatches, but an exclamation from Philip brought him quickly to the bed. Rawlston was sitting bolt upright, with cheeks flushed with fever

and hands that trembled as he turned over the papers. He gave Mr. Brown's telegram to the doctor.

"Mr. Vyner is dead," he said, trying to speak calmly. "It will be an awful blow to my mother and perhaps still worse to Miss Vyner, who is totally unprepared for it."

McBride's pity was excited as well as his professional alarm. He saw his patient had received a shock that quite unnerved him, so drawing a chair to the bedside, he asked whether he could undertake any message for him.

"Is Miss Vyner still here?" Philip asked.

The doctor nodded as he mentally calculated how far on its northern journey the car with its sad company would be.

"She must be told at once," Philip went on. "They will be in New York to-morrow; but who can do it?" His tone was despairing.

Now doctors are accredited with superior tact, and are supposed to tread with the angels rather than rush with the fools, and no one is more convinced of this grace than the profession itself. But McBride was a liberal-minded man, and had a faint suspicion that his judgment had been at fault in selecting the telegrams for his patient's refreshment; he therefore hastened to relieve Philip's distress by shifting the burden of announcement to other shoulders.

"I don't know just how matters stand between Miss Vyner and the young gentleman in the other room," said McBride, smiling, "but I imagine from certain indications I inadvertently surprised, that Lord Bassford is the person best fitted to soothe the lady's grief."

The blow had fallen. Not for a moment did Philip doubt the accuracy of the doctor's inferences. Hadn't it been hanging over him for weeks, and indeed hadn't he virtually accepted it? The preparation had done this much for him, that not an eyelid quivered as he said:

"Will you ask Lord Bassford to come to me?"

McBride demurred.

"Frankly, I'd rather not, Rawlston,"

he said, the wisdom of an owl illuminating his countenance. "You have fever this moment and have had ever since your fall, and any kind of excitement might add to it."

Philip smiled.

"It is simply a question of which kind is the most damaging," he urged. "I am very sure the present worry of knowing Miss Vyner's feelings are at the mercy of the evening papers is worse for me than telling her myself."

McBride tapped his front teeth—it denoted profound thought—and yielded. "I'll send him," he agreed, and dispatching the nurse on an errand, he summoned Lord Bassford and left the two alone.

Philip held out a hot, dry hand, and Bassford grasped it with the heartiness of a person whose luck finds expression in beaming good humor.

"Sorry for your mishap, old chap," he began, lightly, but Philip's grave face warned him of what was coming, and he waited to shape his conversation accordingly.

"Mr. Vyner is dead," said Philip.

"Awful, isn't it?" said Bassford, who couldn't quite bring himself to affect surprise.

"Did you know it?" asked Philip.

"I heard rumors last night when I got to town," Bassford answered, "but I naturally said nothing to Miss Vyner till they were confirmed."

Generally speaking, one respects the reserve among men that makes any allusion to an unacknowledged love affair an offense, but in this instance it was a sad handicap to the force of Philip's request. He wanted to say, "I know you love Priscilla, and, what is more to the purpose, she loves you; *therefore* will you tell her?"

What he did say was:

"Mrs. Nugent is kind-hearted, but hardly the person to go to in trouble. Somebody must tell Miss Vyner before she sees it in the evening papers or has a direct dispatch. Will you do it, Bassford?"

He raised himself on his elbow in his earnestness, while his voice was more a command than an appeal.

Bassford walked to the window and looked through the unchecked shutters at the garden with its terraces of brown earth, and felt a sudden hatred to nature's ghoully imagery of death and life. A blaze of sun-flooded flower beds would have revived his spirits. He came back to the bedside.

"You are right," he said. "She must be told at once, and I will tell her—but God knows I would rather put my hand in the fire!"

It is well for some of us that the still small voice that spake on Horeb is dumb to modern appeal. We are fond of affirming that God knows things when our consciences could prove He knows quite the contrary. Bassford did cordially dislike his office as the messenger of bad tidings, but it was an inevitable step in his scheme, and he also knew that by sympathy at this crisis he could bind Priscilla to him more strongly than by any tenderness of love-making.

"I believe you," said Philip from the bottom of his heart. "Would you mind letting me know how she comes through it?"

He put his package of telegrams into Bassford's hand, and turned his face away from his visitor as an intimation he had nothing more to say.

Bassford arranged the dispatches according to date with businesslike accuracy, and left the room with a promise to look in again before his return to town. Indeed, for a man about to burn off his hand—even figuratively speaking—he showed a calmness that put Archbishop Cranmer to the blush.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Vanderlyn always breakfasted in bed. She assured her friends it equalized her circulation, tranquilized her nerves and neutralized the worries incident to the ordering of a fresh day. Nor was this reluctance to leave her bedroom hard to understand, for it produced an impression of rest and space, two good things almost forgotten by the ordinary denizen of this over-

crowded town. Mrs. Vanderlyn dealt simply with the art of living; she liked comfort and she hated clutter, so her room was warm and light, handsome and rather bare.

A visiting housekeeper was having an audience while the maid was making her lady's breakfast toilette.

"Yes, the blue ribbon, Annette," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, glancing at her hair in the hand mirror. "I believe that is all, Mrs. Truesdale—just to tell the cook he has got his dinner and lunch mixed." She handed back a small *menu* book to the housekeeper. "There are only ladies lunching with me and only gentlemen dining with Mr. Vanderlyn, and that idiotic Frenchman has got knuckles and haunches for lunch and a dab of fruit on a lettuce leaf for dinner—or something about as substantial—see who is knocking."

The maid received the message.

"Mrs. Nugent, ma'am, is downstairs and begs to speak to you for a moment."

Mrs. Vanderlyn glanced at the clock. It pointed to ten.

"What an hour to run one to earth," she muttered, but aloud she consented to see Mrs. Nugent, and prepared for the visit by putting on a blue silk jacket with many frills and adding a touch of color to her cheeks. The coverlet of the bed matched the jacket, and some lace pillows propped the lady in a sitting posture. She was almost majestic and a trifle absurd.

Mrs. Nugent came in looking like a girl of sixteen, blooming, slim, and neat to primness.

"Dear Mrs. Peter," she began, "you must give me your advice; so many things have happened, and I am so alone in the world. First of all, shall I rent my Willowbrook house? Mrs. Vyner wants to take it."

"Where would you go yourself?" asked Mrs. Vanderlyn. "You don't want to open your town house just when it is put up for the season."

"You see," said Mrs. Nugent, "Philip Rawlston is frightfully ill and cannot be moved for weeks, and his mother

said it would oblige her very much if I would rent it as it stands, naming my own terms. That's what I want to consult you about."

"Well," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, "I guess she means it. What do you want to ask? Five hundred a month?"

"Oh, Mrs. Peter!" exclaimed Mrs. Nugent, "five hundred a month wouldn't *begin* to pay me. I thought fifteen hundred."

"For that ramshackle old wooden house! Why, it is plain robbery!" said Mrs. Peter, making room beside her for her breakfast tray.

Mrs. Nugent looked slightly offended.

"I assure you fifteen hundred will hardly repay me for the trouble of moving bag and baggage, to say nothing of setting all the servants by the ears by bringing them to town just at the time they prefer being in the country."

"Spoilt devils!" said Mrs. Peter Augustus, "who cares what they like!"

"I care," said Mrs. Nugent, gently. She didn't altogether like the liberty her friend gave to her tongue, and hastened to change the subject. "Why weren't you at Mr. Vyner's funeral the day before yesterday? It was very impressive; they played that funeral march that sounds like a lullaby for the dead—at least Bassford thinks it does; he's so poetic! And the flowers—oh, Mrs. Peter! The flowers filled two vans and an undertaker's wagon!"

"I sent a wreath," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, setting her teeth in a roll, "but I never go to funerals; they always upset my digestion."

"One has to be careful, of course," said the younger lady, eying her friend's tray heaped with the delicacies of the season. "You surely can't eat all those strawberries. I will help you."

She rolled a strawberry in sugar and with her mouth full, went on:

"I sent a wreath, too—just shaded leaves tied with a pinkish lilac ribbon. I think leaves more suitable to a man, and not so expensive as flowers, though that is a matter of personal taste. You know poor Mrs. Vyner fainted just

when they were pinning on her veil for the funeral and they couldn't revive her in time, so Prissy went alone. They tried to persuade her to stay at home, too, but she said she could not allow her father to be followed by strangers, and so all by herself she walked behind the coffin, and she never trembled or cried. Isn't she wonderful?"

"She is," acquiesced Mrs. Vanderlyn. "Have you heard how Mr. Vyner left his money?"

"Oh, no, dear!"—there was reproof in the tone—"you know I don't often think of money. All I can think of is that poor little crêpe-laden figure following the coffin! Do you suppose Prissy will sell her colored clothes?"

"Being rich, she is bound to be mean," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, controlling a smile. "I fancy she will. Were you thinking of buying them?"

"Possibly," said Mrs. Nugent. "I have to go there at eleven to see Mrs. Vyner. She spent the day at Willowbrook yesterday to be with her son, and it was then she made me the offer. I asked permission to think it over till to-day, but I have decided now, I shall rent. In regard to Prissy's things, I should like to have the first pick; we are about the same size, and I am taking off mourning in five weeks."

"I thought you had taken it off," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, glancing at the costume of faint gray.

"Dear Mrs. Peter!" said the fair Jessie with starting tears, "Gilbert has not been dead two years till the third of May, and this is the twenty-ninth of March!"

"Pardon my lack of delicacy!" said Mrs. Vanderlyn, contracting her eyelids to slits. "I forgot one mourned by the calendar."

"I know you never meant to wound, dear," said the gentle widow, "but I couldn't bear to have any one find me wanting in respect to Gilbert. Do you happen to know whether Lord Bassford is in town?"

"Oh, yes, he's still here," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, shrugging her shoulders. "I suppose you heard that he brought Lady Pengordon up from Palm Beach

as soon as she heard of Pengordon's suicide, and saw her off on the steamer. The only wonder is that he didn't cross with her if one can believe half the stories people are writing from the South about them. Such goings-on! I declare they would astonish their own fast set in England, and I can't put it stronger than that. I only hope Priscilla Vyner has not been told. She has troubles enough of her own, poor child, without fretting over Bassford's flirtations."

"I can't see what business it is of hers," said Mrs. Nugent, crossly, "and if by any chance it did concern her she might better know now than later. I happen to have proof that Bassford never did care for her—that his interests lie in quite a different direction—but Priscilla is so immature she takes all love-making *au pied de la lettre*."

"And I believe," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, warmly, "that in spite of his flirtations he does care for her. All men are Mormons *au fond*! Why, I wouldn't trust Peter around the corner if I didn't know he kept his heart safe in his pocket!"

But the whereabouts of Peter's heart did not interest Mrs. Nugent. She was buttoning her smart little coat over the most perfectly fitting blouse, and rose to go while she continued her conversation.

"I fancy Bassford will be a good deal disappointed, not to say nonplused, at my renting, for he has made Phil Rawlston's illness a pretext for haunting my house; but you know, Mrs. Peter, I have never encouraged him, and *will not* till after the first of May."

She tripped downstairs and into her cab and was soon at the Vyners' door.

"Mrs. Vyner will see no one, ma'am," said the dignified person who opened the door.

"She will see me," said Mrs. Nugent, briskly, "for I come by her own appointment."

She was shown into a little reception-room on the ground floor, while her name was taken up to Mrs. Vyner. Mrs. Nugent's restless eyes wandered from chair to sofa, and finally lit upon

a man's hat, gloves and stick carelessly thrown on the table. Somebody else had been made to wait in that room, and instead of surrendering his hat in the hall had left it in full view to betray him. It was familiar to Mrs. Nugent, but just to make sure she turned it over, and pasted in the crown was Bassford's visiting card.

Her first thought was: "How heartless in Priscilla to see young men two days after her father's funeral," but her conceit saved the situation. "He is trying to get some message to take to Philip Rawlston just as an excuse to come down once more."

The same solemn person who let her in now returned and conducted her to the library. Mrs. Vyner was already there, the pale shadow of her former self, but calm and self-possessed. She was perfectly willing to talk; indeed, she gave one the impression of grasping the reins of conversation in order to keep it away from impertinent sympathy.

"I trust," she said, "you have come to say that we may have your house. My son's illness is likely to be so protracted that we really could not stay on any other footing, and to move him is impossible at present. Do not let terms stand in your way."

Mrs. Nugent, without a blush, named the price she considered adequate, and Mrs. Vyner accepted it with equal calm; indeed, her one thought was to find a quiet retreat to nurse her boy and mourn her dead, and she would have given thousands instead of hundreds to get rid of Mrs. Nugent's presence in the Willowbrook house. Mrs. Nugent, who was shrewd in spite of her silliness, saw that she might have got more rent, and grew red with vexation.

"The end of the week you will take possession?" she asked.

"This afternoon, if you please," begged Mrs. Vyner. "My dear Mrs. Nugent, I cannot be separated from my son at this time. Perhaps you do not appreciate how dangerously ill he is. Pray send down packers and do anything you like to hasten the work, but do not ask me to delay my going."

A sully "As you please" brought

Mrs. Vyner to a sense of her own unreasonableness.

"Of course," she explained, "I mean that I become the lessee from this afternoon, but I trust you and your servants will suit your own convenience about moving out. I shall be glad if in any way I can repay some of your kindness to Philip."

Much mollified, Mrs. Nugent begged to see Priscilla.

"She has seen no one," said Mrs. Vyner, sadly, "not even her friend Mrs. Carter, but I can send and ask her."

"Why, Mrs. Vyner!" said the visitor, her eyes growing round with surprise, "she is seeing Lord Bassford at this moment, and if she can see him I should think she could see me. However, if you think she had rather not, perhaps you will give her my message. I only wanted to say that if she has any French clothes to sell—owing to her going into black, you know—I'd like to buy them, as I am leaving off mourning and Priscilla's gowns fit me exactly."

"Sell her clothes!" said Mrs. Vyner, stiffening. "My dear Mrs. Nugent, why should she do such an unladylike thing? Are there no people to give them to that she should turn herself into an old clothes man for money?"

"You talk as if it were unheard of," said Mrs. Nugent, pettishly.

"And isn't it?" asked Mrs. Vyner, crimson with indignation. "You will have to write your own message to Priscilla. I certainly should not venture to submit any such proposal."

Mrs. Nugent took her departure, very much aggrieved and without the solace of knowing that she had left a sting behind her.

That Priscilla should be receiving Lord Bassford at this time of sorrow seemed to Mrs. Vyner little short of an insult to her father's memory, but being a high-minded woman, she refused to believe it till she had sent to the girl's room and been told she was in the drawing-room with a gentleman.

In the chaos of disappointed hopes and frustrated plans that confronted Mrs. Vyner, one resolution stood out

clear; she would give her husband's child the fullness of loving consideration, but she would carry out his wishes to the letter.

Priscilla also made resolutions after her warm-hearted fashion, but it seemed as if an adverse fate were always checking them before they were half carried out. Through no fault of her own, she seemed to blow hot and to blow cold—to make steps up the ladder of good fellowship only to fall prone to the bottom.

The days that had intervened between her first knowledge of her loss and the present moment had been spent in putting herself and her own grief aside, and lavishing upon her step-mother the devotion she knew her father would have prized at her hands. Indeed, this care for another had carried her through those dreary hours as nothing else could, except the numbing sense of unreality. From the first the news carried no conviction; the words reached her brain, but left her heart untouched, so that the task of telling her had been much simpler than Philip feared.

When Bassford had left Rawlston's bedside the morning of his engagement, he met Mrs. Nugent in the passage and learned from her that Priscilla was still in the parlor.

"Give me a few minutes alone with Miss Vyner, will you, Mrs. Nugent?" he asked. "I have bad news to tell her; her father is dead."

Mrs. Nugent colored a lovely blush.

"You are so considerate of my feelings," she said. "Who but you would assume such a task in order to spare me?"

"The conceit of that excellent woman is 'the biggest thing on earth,'" thought Bassford in true American vernacular, as he shut the door upon himself and his little ladylove.

He told her with his cheek against hers and his arms around her, ready to shield her from every distress. Alas, that human love should be so powerless against the shadowy enemy that defies all vigilance! It would almost seem as if Death were a connoisseur in torture,

and marked his preference where the agony of separation is keenest.

If Bassford expected the girl to collapse under the blow he must have been agreeably surprised.

"I hear what you say," she said, calmly, "and it simply means nothing to me. I don't want to cry and I don't think I exactly believe it."

Bassford murmured some endearments about her bravery and his love, but Priscilla hardly heard him; she disengaged herself from his arms and sat very straight. She seemed to be thinking rapidly.

"I shall take the next train to town," she said. "Indeed I ought to have gone this morning. Perhaps you will come with me, dear Bassford."

In the train she hardly spoke and she looked hard and strained. She had discarded her riding habit and was wearing a black dress borrowed from Mrs. Nugent, and the unusual somberness of her costume added to the pallor of her complexion. Her companion recognized an aloofness in her attitude that ever so slightly wounded his vanity. They parted at the ferry where her own brougham was waiting for her, and as he watched the little carriage threading its imperious way in front of cable cars and under the noses of dray-horses, Bassford felt as if his new happiness were escaping out of his life.

In town she gave her orders and made her arrangements with the good sense of an American young woman who for several years has been accustomed to act for herself. She sent for her father's man of business and for Mr. Carter, and was glad to let them do what they could to help her, but when, on the following day, the time came to meet her father's train, she insisted upon going across the river alone.

"Oh, don't ask to come with me, Gorry!" she said, almost irritably, to that fussy spinster. "I should inevitably be cross to you, and you are so good to me," and she kissed Miss Gorry's cheek.

The only time she felt an inclination to cry was when Plummer spoke to her as she got into the carriage.

"God bless you, Miss Prissy, and help you in your trouble," he said, with tears in his eyes.

She was no longer his young mistress; she was a poor little girl in trouble. His kindness went straight to her heart. She tried to say, "Thank you, Plummer," but it was a failure.

The rest of that morning's experience Priscilla tried never to think of, for to her crushing grief was added the memory of every commonplace detail of ferryboat and railway station, burned into her brain as if it were her voluntary wish to keep it there forever. The patient expression of an express horse on the boat was as sharply defined as that silent meeting that took place a few moments later.

Mr. Carter must have followed her, for it was he who hurried her down the long platform and into the car, and then strange people seemed to stand aside to let her pass and a door opened. Mrs. Vyner surrendered her place beside the narrow bed to Priscilla, but the girl motioned her back and, throwing herself into her arms, burst into sobs.

It was her only breakdown. When she had once more got control of herself she became a mouthpiece for her stepmother; she nursed her and waited upon her and carried her orders.

She denied herself to Bassford, telling him in a tender little note that the care of her stepmother was the only service she could now pay to her father, and her own affections must be put aside; and indeed to have intruded her love affairs upon Mrs. Vyner at such a time would have seemed lacking in decency. He came to the house twice a day and was sometimes rewarded by a few lines, and finally on the day of Mrs. Nugent's visit he was admitted by Priscilla's orders.

The girl had meant to take her stepmother into her confidence, but on going into her room she had found a dressmaker trying on several black dresses, and before the fitting was over Lord Bassford had arrived.

At twelve o'clock she dismissed her lover and once more sought her stepmother. Poor Mrs. Vyner, who would

have welcomed peace, felt it her duty to invite war. She was beginning to understand the intricacies of Priscilla's character, and the difficulties that her husband had met with masculine despair.

The girl was capable of tenderness, of self-effacement, in the highest degree, but she was absurdly over-confident in her own judgments. Unconsciously she had modeled herself on her father and her father's friends. She admired the way in which men decided for themselves without talking over every point; when a thing was to be done, they did it, taking the consequences, and Priscilla was quite willing to bear the results of her own mistakes. Her conceit lay in supposing that her twenty years of sheltered experience in the least fitted her to judge of anything.

Mrs. Vyner was at her writing desk when Priscilla knocked, and she begged the girl to sit near her. If a battle were imminent it need not be precipitated. She explained her plans at some length; that she had taken the house where Philip was, that she was going to Willowbrook that afternoon for the night, and although she expected to return to town the next day for some hours, the country would be her headquarters, and consequently she begged Priscilla to retain Miss Goring; and this brought her to the end of her small talk.

"I must put a plain question," said Mrs. Vyner, leaning her elbows on the desk and clasping her hands nervously. "What possible reason is there for Lord Bassford's coming to the house at this time—except to leave a card—or for your receiving him? You know, my child, your father felt acutely upon the subject."

Priscilla's color rose, but she answered gently.

"I wanted to tell you before I saw him, but you were busy. He has asked me to marry him, and we were waiting for papa's consent. Oh! do not assume that I am wrong until you hear what I have to say."

Mrs. Vyner dropped her head on her hands and waited.

"I know papa disapproved while he thought Bassford was gambling, but indeed the poor boy hasn't touched a card for months, and he has given me his promise never, under any temptation or circumstances, to do it again as long as he lives. That removes papa's only objection."

She smiled proudly as if willing to do battle for her lover's sincerity.

"Priscilla, how can you be so childish!" said her stepmother. "What gambler or drunkard ever kept his promise to the woman he loved, and who knows whether Lord Bassford even loves you?—it may be only your money."

"You are insulting!" began the girl, and then repented herself. "No, no, I beg your pardon. I know you mean to be wise and kind, but you shock me so. What kind of standards can you have when you doubt a gentleman's word of honor! Wouldn't you be indignant if any one thought my father or Philip capable of lying? I thought so—I, too, have my feelings, and I claim your respect for Bassford."

She had risen in her excitement, and her expression was almost tragic.

Mrs. Vyner saw the helplessness of argument.

"He must be his own accuser," she said, sadly. "I will not ask you to take your father's judgment or mine; all I ask is your promise not to see him for twenty-four hours. I shall be here tomorrow after lunch to meet our lawyers, and together we have some business to attend to."

CHAPTER X.

"Will you please put it in plain language?" said Priscilla, starting forward in her chair, her slender fingers grasping the arms.

The person addressed was her father's lifelong friend and legal adviser, Mr. James Holden. He had finished reading Mr. Vyner's will to that gentleman's widow and daughter and laid the document on the table while he fitted his eyeglasses into their case.

"What is obscure?" he asked, slightly nettled. "I never read a will more simple or more to the point. Your father leaves a third of his estate out and out to Mrs. Vyner and the rest to you, but, realizing the danger of a young lady in your circumstances being the object of fortune hunters, he leaves your money in trust with a reversion to your children. Until you are thirty, your trustees—Mrs. Vyner and Mr. Vanderlyn—have discretionary power over your income; after thirty you may spend it as you like."

Priscilla's voice shook a little as she asked:

"Do you mean that I am dependent on the caprice of my trustees for every penny I spend?" There was battle in her eye.

"You put it somewhat harshly, Miss Vyner," said the gentleman. "Your trustees will have no wish to curtail your proper expenditure—and if they did the courts wouldn't support them—but in the event of your making such a marriage as your father reprobates—"

Priscilla interrupted.

"My father doesn't clearly state what kind of a marriage he does reprobate; he leaves me at the mercy of my trustees." There was almost a sob.

"Pardon me, Miss Vyner," said the lawyer, "the will refers to a personal letter of instruction on that point to each of your trustees. I fancy there is no doubt in their minds as to the occasions when they are to safeguard you by exercising their powers."

He glanced for corroboration at Mrs. Vyner, who gravely bowed.

Priscilla felt like a creature in a trap.

"Have I nothing of my own?" she asked, with anxiety.

"You have about five thousand a year from your mother's estate," answered Mr. Holden, smiling at the paucity of the sum named.

Priscilla sat motionless, but over the open generosity of her expression something was settling like a cloud. It was more than disappointment; there was suspicion and something unpleasantly like hatred in the veiled look she turned upon Mrs. Vyner.

Mr. Holden was talking to the elder lady of ways and means, and current expenses, while Priscilla's angry thoughts were lashing her to fury.

As Mr. Holden rose to go she confronted him with another question.

"When was this will made?" she asked.

"It was drawn up at your father's request the day before his marriage and executed soon after the ceremony at my house. He was on his way to catch his train with Mrs. Vyner." The lawyer again glanced at Mrs. Vyner as if to confirm the statement.

If anything could have added poignancy to the blow it was the period of its preparation. Priscilla was lost in a black reverie, oblivious of her companions. Her memory gave her back scene after scene that marked the way to this injustice, and at every point she could see Mrs. Vyner's influence perverting her father's love.

It began with his engagement; an artful intrigue (Priscilla called it) on the part of Mrs. Rawlston, where she had worked upon a father's solicitude for his daughter till every innocent unconventionality was magnified into an indiscretion and the only remedy—a stepmother. And then she thought of the quarrel in that very room the night when she had waited up for him and he had vaguely threatened her with some coercion in case she insisted upon marrying Lord Bassford. It was plain, in the light of present events, her father came straight from her enemy to her. But last and worst was the thought that this injustice was in progress when they parted—when she drew him into her room and forgave him his marriage and offered him her unchanged love—to think that *then*, while he blessed her, he was putting her independence, her happiness into the hands of the woman he knew she hated.

And the motives for all this?

On her father's part, mistaken love; of that, Priscilla was sure, although he had fallen in her estimation to a weak instrument in the hands of a schemer; but on Mrs. Vyner's part—greed. She almost said it out loud in the frenzy of

the conviction. Greed for the control of money or—here was a new and more unpleasant suggestion—greed for her son. If it were Philip Rawlston she wished to marry she would lay any odds on finding one complaisant trustee. The idea tickled her bitter fancy and she laughed.

Mrs. Vyner was standing near the door, having a few last words with Mr. Holden, when Priscilla's laugh startled her, though it was little more than an exclamation of derision.

"Did you speak?" asked Mrs. Vyner.

Priscilla ignored her question and crossed the room to Mr. Holden.

"How much is my mother's estate worth, if you sold everything?" she asked, with flashing eyes.

"A hundred thousand dollars at the most," he announced, "but at a forced sale probably less."

"Sell everything," she commanded, "and put the money to my account. I presume I can give what orders I please with that."

"You are still a minor, Miss Vyner. Your father was the guardian of that fund, but for the next six months—until you are twenty-one—the courts must appoint a person in his place."

There was a note of triumph in Mr. Holden's voice as he scored this point. Priscilla had antagonized him.

Baffled in this last hope, the girl sank into a chair and tried to think out the situation, and her final question was put very sadly.

"From this fund how much income is now lying at my credit? Will you find out and let me know?"

He turned back and opened his papers.

"I have a memorandum here of all your father's interests and his various bank accounts." A blunt forefinger searched a column. "You have spent nothing of this income during the present year. You have had twenty-five hundred dollars at your credit since the first of January, and you will have the rest on the first of July."

Five thousand dollars between her and submission! Five thousand dollars until she should be of age, and

then a hundred thousand dollars spread over nine years. Could she and Bassford live on so meager a sum? He was used to doing with little, and she, though she knew nothing of economy, would be proud to learn. And then, best of all, it would prove Bassford no fortune hunter.

Bowing her head gravely to the lawyer and without glancing at Mrs. Vyner, she went to her own room and locked the door.

To Mrs. Vyner the terms of the will had been no surprise. Her husband had taken her into his confidence from the first; but far from influencing him to restrict Priscilla's freedom, the plan had met with her hearty disapprobation, and she had begged not to be named as trustee. Only the extreme improbability of her ever being called upon to act had induced her at last to yield to his request. That Priscilla looked upon her as the instigator of the trouble never crossed her mind, though she saw the girl was deeply wounded and at odds with the world.

The afternoon wore on. A gentleman was admitted to a private interview with Mrs. Vyner and he had gone, but Priscilla did not appear. It was almost time for Mrs. Vyner to leave for her train if she meant to join Philip that day, and she sent her own maid to Priscilla's room, with the message that Mrs. Vyner was starting for Willowbrook and would Miss Vyner come and speak to her before she left; and the answer came back that Miss Vyner had a bad headache and begged to be excused.

From her window Priscilla saw her stepmother get into the carriage and drive off, and with a sigh of relief she opened her door and flew down the passageway to Miss Goring's bedroom and rapped sharply.

"Gorry," she said, "pack your trunk. I'm going away in an hour and you're going with me."

"Where?" said Miss Goring, feebly.

Such a minor point had not yet received Priscilla's consideration. Her first idea was to put space between herself and her stepmother; her second to

live on her own income in some retired place, free from humiliating dependence. Because the Long Island road was the last one she had traveled it now presented itself to her mind as leading to solitudes such as she coveted—dreary wastes of shore and sea, where the winds blew unchecked over the beach grass, and the brackish ponds, beyond the sheltering sand dunes, reflect nothing nearer earth than a passing cloud against the heavenly blue. Priscilla's imagination was floating to the nethermost stone of Montauk when Miss Goring's voice brought her back.

"I shall not go without Mrs. Vyner's permission," said the usually complaisant Gorry, plucking up spirit.

"As you like," said Priscilla. "I can take my maid."

"I shall telephone Mrs. Vyner," said the unhappy Gorry, "that you are going—"

"Where?" said Priscilla, in her turn.

"You are being very wicked, Priscilla," said Miss Goring. "I can see it in the look of your mouth, and your father hardly cold in his grave. I wish I had not undertaken to manage you!"

The phrase was so absurd as used by Gorry that Priscilla laughed and kissed her, and the action presented Miss Goring to herself in all her feebleness.

Further remonstrance was interrupted by the arrival of a servant with a note left by Mrs. Vyner for Priscilla. The girl opened it, and she walked back to her own room. She was never anxious to read her letters in Gorry's company, for the good woman's eyes had a way of wandering over the edges of a page and surprising a signature, that made Priscilla ready to beat her.

The letter should have appealed to the girl, for it bore the stamp of truth.

MY DEAR PRISCILLA: Since you will not allow me a personal interview, I must write to you at the risk of missing my train.

I wish to say to you that I am truly sorry your father made me your trustee; it complicates our relations, and, besides, I have always felt the unwisdom of being wise for other people in money affairs. Still, such was his wish, and I beg you for his sake—for all our sakes—to help me to carry out his plans with as little friction as may be.

I shall always treat you with frankness, and therefore I must tell you that I have seen Lord Bassford, who came by appointment immediately after Mr. Holden left. He knows now just how you stand in regard to money—in regard to your father's wishes—in regard to my unwillingness to disobey my husband's commands.

I have asked Lord Bassford to return and see you himself at five o'clock, by which time I trust you will have recovered from the agitation of your interview with Mr. Holden.

I hope the future will show how very sincerely and affectionately I am,

Yours, K. V.

Once more Priscilla flitted down the passage.

"Gorry," she cried, "I'm not going to-day, so you needn't communicate with Mrs. Vyner just yet."

And even in the whirl of contending emotions she noticed with amusement that Miss Goring's trunk was open and the trays on the floor. Certainly Gorry was a submissive duenna.

Bassford was late in keeping his second appointment, and the delay added to Priscilla's nervousness. She couldn't think clearly; the events of the day seemed to her like some strange pantomime. Ideas bounded into her mind, as it were, by handspings—inconsequent as the entrance of the clown—and as abruptly departed, but out of the medley certain things stood plain.

She didn't want to see Bassford!

So much she knew, but she was too tired to think why. She felt like an unmasked impostor, and scorned herself for daring to feel so. It wasn't her fault that her lover was treated with suspicion by her father. It was worse for her than for him. If she could bear it, he could. After all, they were only going through the usual misery that older people delight in inflicting on their children. It is enough to fall in love to be treated by your nearest and dearest as a pariah, beyond the pale of human sympathy. Why should she and Bassford be exempt from such troubles?

She had thrown herself on the sofa in her own boudoir, but the bitterness of her mood made inaction distasteful, and she had almost made up her mind

to go out for a short walk as long as Bassford had disregarded his appointment, when he came.

The drawing-room was an enormous room opening at the end into a picture gallery, and at the opening Bassford was standing with his hands in his pockets, taking a *coup d'œil* of Mr. Vyner's art treasures. The attitude was so nonchalant that Priscilla could hardly believe its sincerity as she came slowly toward him, and as she got close to him the drawn expression of his face confirmed her opinion. He started when she spoke and, turning, took both her hands, but offered no warmer greeting.

She looked up at him with trembling lips.

"Won't you kiss me and say you are sorry papa has treated me so unkindly? I have no one in the world now but you."

He stooped and kissed her very gently, and led her to a sofa in the solitude of the picture gallery, where no prying ear could overhear their conversation.

"My dear child," he said, "you do not suppose I contemplate separating you from your friends and your fortune, and giving you in exchange my debts and worries? That would be the part of a coward."

The sophistry bewildered her for a moment, but only for a moment.

"And I care for neither friends nor fortune," she answered, "only for your love. The cowardly part would be to leave me when I need you so desperately."

"Ah!" he said, with a sigh. "That is because you have never felt the pinch of poverty. You have no idea of what it means to gentle people."

"But you don't understand," she remonstrated. "It is only for a time we should be poor, and even then we should have something. At thirty I come into the income of five millions, and then we could do all the things you wish. First we would pay your debts and then rebuild Bassingdean; and we should know, by that time, how to make an income go a long way. The experience would be as good as a course in

economics!" she said, trying to be light-minded.

But she met with no answering smile—his grave face was taking the courage out of her plans. It was with humility she managed to tell him of the hundred thousand that was to be spread thinly over the nine years of waiting, and she was hardly surprised when he shook his head and said it might perhaps pay her milliner's bill. However impracticable, Priscilla was both unselfish and loving, and she made one more effort to solve the question of their marrying on ten thousand a year in a way that should least shock his prejudices.

"Couldn't we live on your moor in Scotland for six months of the year and spend almost nothing?—I shouldn't have milliner's bills—and our winters we could pass in Italy wherever it is cheap. Besides," she added, with animation, as a new idea struck her, "at the end of the nine years there would be a large sum waiting for us—the accumulated income crying to be spent! Couldn't you be patient for my sake, Bassford?"

"It is no question of patience," he said, getting up and pacing the square of the rug in front of them. "It is a question of squalor. With our tastes and my debts we should come to grief before half the time was over; and to be quite honest with you I shouldn't trust my own resolution. If I were once more in my proper position, free from debt and with the occupations that belong to men of my rank, I should have every incentive to keep straight; but in a downhill struggle I should be sure to fall back into old habits. You have no idea how they hold one, my darling."

He wasn't looking at her face, or he would have been prepared for her outburst of horror.

"Do you mean that *you could break a promise?*"

She was gazing at him as if her life depended on his answer.

"Not willingly," he answered, "but we are supposing a new condition of things."

"What has a new condition of things to do with your word of honor?" she demanded, her face growing stern. "You made the promise voluntarily: 'I swear to you whether you marry me or not, never again to touch a card.' Those were your words, Bassford, and I promised to marry you then and there because I believed you. You must remember."

He nodded.

"The conditions are changed, all the same," he said, a trifle obstinately. "If I saw you needing the things you are accustomed to have now for the asking, don't you think I should be tempted to try any means to add to our income?"

"I'd despise you if you did," she retorted.

"We will not put it to the test," he said, sadly. "You are like all women; sentiment is dearer to you than reality. You are proposing to make sacrifices for me that I cannot accept at your hands, and when—knowing my own weakness—I try to point out to you the dangers, you cry out against me as if I were a criminal."

"Oh, no!" she said, standing before him and laying her hands on his breast, "but I thought you were treating your promise as if it were made for fair weather, not for storm, and it frightened me—but you didn't mean it, dear, did you? Forgive me."

"Do I mean to try to run straight for the rest of my life? Yes. Do I mean to let you impoverish yourself for me? No. But I am only a mortal man, and a weak one, and I mean to fly temptation. Good-by, my dear little love," and he strained her to his heart.

"Don't go!" she sobbed. "How can you leave me like this? I begin to doubt your love, Bassford!"

He let her go and stood looking toward the door as if she were detaining him against his will, but she could not part from him. She took his hand and began to speak rapidly, beating a nervous tattoo on his sleeve to mark her words.

"What did Mrs. Vyner say that has wounded you so?" she asked, willing to blame her enemy. "Can't you see

that there is yet hope that Mr. Vanderlyn may be on our side—that the trustees may allow us something? Even a small allowance with my mother's money added would give us plenty. Don't give up till we have asked them. Where is your courage?"

He drew himself up with a fine dignity—or was it only a clever semblance?

"Do you think I'm going to beg your trustees to make me an allowance? My dear Priscilla, you don't seem to see that the whole situation is an insult to me—a protest against my character. Your father has even made me the means of punishing you for loving me. I decline to be his rod."

And he was gone.

Priscilla sank back among the cushions of the sofa, completely exhausted with the emotions of the day.

Those solitudes she had been picturing seemed more beneficent than ever to her wounded spirit. If sea breezes could blow away sorrow and the wash of the waves lull the pain of the heart, how simple the panacea!

Bassford's renunciation grew less dignified and more calculating when the fascination of his presence ceased to influence Priscilla's judgment. She told herself that plenty of young people in her class of life lived upon half the sum she had proposed to her lover—girl friends of her own, who had faced small privations to marry the men of their hearts; and, almost unsuspected by her, a respect for her father's test of conduct crept into her mind. It was the leaden casket upon which Bassford had turned his back.

So a little comfort came to Priscilla in her loneliness and desertion; the comfort of recognizing justice where she had only seen unkindness.

CHAPTER XI.

The little *crêpe*-laden figure, that had so appealed to Mrs. Nugent's sense of the pitiful on the day of Mr. Vyner's funeral, must have been in search of still more *crêpe*, for it disappeared in

the doorway of a fashionable dressmaking establishment just as Gilbert Nugent's discreet relict turned the corner of the selfsame street.

If Mrs. Nugent had any doubt of her friend's identity—for one black figure is, after all, much the same as another—it was set at rest by the victoria that was slowly driving up and down the block. Whoever knew Priscilla Vyner knew Plummer, the coachman, body-guard and friend.

"Is Miss Vyner at Mme. Guilbert's?" asked Mrs. Nugent of Billy Jenkins, who, in the habiliments of woe, stood at the foot of the steps holding his mistress' black parasol.

Now Billy had been learning lessons in discretion since his first introduction to these pages, and no longer spoke unadvisedly of the affairs of his employers.

"Couldn't say, ma'am, as I rightly see which steps she went up," said Billy, with the pride of reticence, and it was no fault of his that the circumspect widow was not landed in the most notorious gambling house in town.

Fortunately the sleuth instinct had made her sure of the door, so ringing the bell, she found Miss Vyner was there having a fitting. Mrs. Nugent scribbled a few words on her card and confided it to the Buttons, who opened the door, who, in turn, gave it to a slavey in short petticoats and pigtail, who promised to carry it to Miss Vyner, and when a critical scrutiny had satisfied the pair of the lady's respectability she was invited into the front room to wait.

Two rooms opened into each other, grand with brocaded furniture, pictures and statuary, while the only sign of trade was a long row of wardrobes wainscoting the back room. Three or four young women, dressed in the last Paris models, were busy returning laces and embroideries to their boxes and hanging up the dresses which had been recently shown to a customer. The figures of these young ladies were walking tributes to the triumph of art over nature; from the waist up they were so much in advance of the human perpendicular that a plumb line dropped from

their haughty bosoms would have struck the carpet a foot in front of their toes. They handled the five hundred toilettes as indifferently as you or I—oh, simply-dressed reader!—would handle our last year's rainy-day garments.

"I want to see that maize-colored evening dress," said Mrs. Nugent, keen for the fashions; and at the sound of her voice, as she came from the front room, a magnificent creature turned, with a slow smile, and held the yellow skirt against her hip.

"Were you thinking of ordering an evening gown? If so, perhaps you will be good enough to give me your name and address." To accent the first syllable of the word *address* is the crowning elegance in saleslady English.

Mrs. Nugent resented the intimation that an investigation of her social and financial standing was desired, and she answered, quite sharply:

"I may or I may not. I am waiting to speak to my friend Miss Vyner."

The name was an open sesame.

The wardrobe doors flew back; simple little creations for morning wear, dinner and evening dresses were freely displayed for the inspection of Miss Vyner's friend, and so absorbed was Mrs. Nugent in noting such novelties as could be reproduced by her own maid at small expense, that she was really sorry when Priscilla's arrival obliged her to tear herself from the entertainment.

Just why Mrs. Nugent was in pursuit of Miss Vyner was not apparent, but as her card had begged a few minutes' conversation, Priscilla announced herself at her disposal.

"Oh, could you drive me down to Tiffany's?" Mrs. Nugent urged, and when the favor was granted she thanked the lovely bevy of ladies who had so kindly contributed to her amusement, and without leaving the ghost of an order she accompanied Priscilla to the carriage.

"My dear," she began, as they drove from the door, "I couldn't talk to you before those women, but I wanted to suggest that if Guilbert has any of your colored dresses half finished—things you

ordered before going in mourning, you know, dear—I shall be very glad to take them off your hands—at a slight reduction."

Priscilla searched her memory.

"I think everything had been sent home before I put on mourning," she answered, in a listless voice, for the matter seemed of little moment to her. "But why should you trouble about my clothes; they wouldn't suit you, I'm sure."

"But I like your things better than my own," almost wailed Mrs. Nugent, "and as I shall have to spend a great deal in going out of mourning, I thought, dear, I might oblige you, and as well, myself, by taking some of your frocks off your hands at any price you think it fair to ask for second-hand things."

She was panting with eagerness—too intent on Priscilla's face to return the friendly bows that greeted her from sidewalk and carriage as they passed rapidly down Fifth Avenue.

"My maid was speaking to me about my clothes only this morning," said Priscilla, with a heightened color, "and I said I hardly knew what to do with them. So many are unsuitable to give to the people one is accustomed to help. Dear Jessie," she added, embarrassed by her own daring, "I am almost afraid to say it unless you promise not to be angry—but wouldn't you let me send you some of the things I have never worn? Don't be vexed, and say yes as a favor to me; it would be such a pleasure."

Mrs. Nugent was beaming, but she made a feint of reluctance.

"Really, Prissy, I should rather pay," she said, gently. "Not that I am proud, dear—only that you must also have great expenses."

Priscilla gave a weary sigh.

"As I am circumstanced at present I have more money than I know what to do with," and she turned her head away to hide the tears that were so ready to betray her.

Only a few days ago she had been glorying in the thought of economies, only to find them refused; and since then no word of sorrow or relenting

from Bassford had come to reinstate him in her eyes. She believed him unworthy, and yet longed to find herself mistaken. How could love so passionate as his end in a day!

With an effort she brought herself back to the conversation. A few more words overcame Mrs. Nugent's scruples, and she agreed to accept from Priscilla a choice assortment of hats and frocks with which that young lady had anticipated the needs of the summer.

At Forty-second Street they passed a wall covered with theatrical announcements, and most prominent was "The Earl of Pawtucket."

"Capital play," began Mrs. Nugent. "Really, dear, if you haven't seen it you ought to go—oh, how thoughtless I am! Of course you can't! Still, the man who does the earl is excellent, and speaking of titles reminds me of Polly Pengordon. Do you know they say that Pengordon killed himself because he had gambled away every penny, and when he cabled to Polly to come to his assistance she wouldn't let him have a dollar, and he just blew his brains out? I think she was perfectly right, too. Do you know Lord Bassford sailed yesterday?"

Priscilla's heart gave such a thump that she couldn't speak. She shook her head, while her lips framed a feeble "No."

"Yes. He went to say good-by to the Spencer Ingots, who came back unexpectedly, but to no one else. It was very sudden, I believe."

By an effort Priscilla steadied her voice—at any cost she felt she must protect herself from that babbling tongue.

"Why did he go?" she asked, coldly.

"Priscilla!" exclaimed Mrs. Nugent. "One would think you lived in a nunnery—do you never hear the news of the day? Why, everybody knows Polly Pengordon cabled for him. I suppose she found she couldn't exist without him after their affair at Palm Beach. Now, I'm never hard on other women; I don't blame her for refusing to give Lord Pengordon more money to spend on—I mean, as he was spending it at Monte

Carlo; but I do think a widow ought to show proper respect to her husband's memory, and not send for her lover before he is well in his grave."

"How do you know he was her lover?" asked the girl, with flaming cheeks.

"Well, they were not at much pains to conceal it, according to all the gossip from the South. However, don't let's discuss it. I never think it is nice for girls to know about such things, and I only told you because I fancied at one time you seemed rather taken with Bassford yourself."

"I am sure your intentions are of the best," said Priscilla, assuming an air of indifference, "but I quite agree with you about not wishing to discuss such things. I have just remembered that I promised Miss Goring to be home by twelve, so if you don't mind going on to Tiffany's by yourself I will get out and walk home." And overcoming her friend's remonstrances with the assurance that she needed exercise, she escaped further torture except what was furnished by her own wounded pride.

Behind the shelter of her veil she was in solitary communion with her thoughts, and they were pressing upon her with insistent force. She tried to form hasty judgments in regard to Bassford; she went over their last interview word by word as her memory gave it back, even to tones of voice and gestures, and she asked herself whether it had all been clever acting, and the answer was "No."

He had cared for her—she was sure he had; it was only that he cared still more for his own comfort. Having made sure, as he believed, of a fortune, he could not willingly face the privations of marriage on a small income. Perhaps at this juncture the cable from Lady Pengordon may have shown him how necessary he was to her, and suggested a new way out of his difficulties by paying court to another American heiress. As to the scandals Mrs. Nugent hinted at, Priscilla dismissed them from her mind. She was prepared to banish Bassford from her heart without wading through the mire of such reports.

A new humility possessed her. She felt the loneliness of her youth and inexperience; she wanted her father with a longing that was physical pain. She found her breath coming in sobs, and like Joseph, she "sought where to weep." A little church was open across the street, and some men were adjusting an awning over the door. Priscilla walked past them unchallenged, and choosing a side pew near the end, she put her head down, and sobbed till she was tired.

The chancel was a bower of spring blossoms; the midday sun poured through the rich glass of the clerestory, touching the white altar cloth with splashes of color. Now and then a hushed footfall broke the silence as if the humble artist who had created this Eden of bridal bloom were stepping back to admire his handicraft, and pronounce it good.

Priscilla stopped crying, and began to pray. Perhaps she believed that a prayer might be allowed to carry her repentance to her father, and, if so, she was by no means the first unhappy woman who had tried in the same way to bridge the chasm of the unknown.

Suddenly the organ gave a sigh through its great lungs, and began the forest music from "Siegfried"—pure, fresh, exalted and yet earthly—the very spirit of the dawn.

Priscilla stood listening, hating to tear herself away. She seemed lifted above the troubles and mortifications that had lately darkened her life; she, too, would begin a new day.

She drew her veil over her face, and came out into the noise and clatter of the streets.

Priscilla had nearly reached home, when she came face to face with Philip's surgeon, Dr. McBride, hurrying down the steps of a neighbor's house. He would hardly have recognized his little Willowbrook acquaintance even if she had been dressed as she was on the memorable day when he was first called to Philip Rawlston's bedside, and incidentally surprised a love scene between her and Lord Bassford through the

crack of the door; but she remembered him, and plied him with questions in regard to Philip.

McBride's face grew serious. He was forced to admit that Mr. Rawlston was not improving; there was a point of irritation at the base of the injured lung that made him extremely anxious. He never knew a man—apparently quiet and self-contained, whose health was so subservient to his mental condition. He had a way of compelling people to tell him what he wished to know—notably his mother—and listening with a deceptive calm, and then, before they suspected mischief, his temperature was up to danger point, and he, McBride, was pursued by telegrams and telephones all over the Borough of Manhattan.

"What is there to tell him?" asked Priscilla.

"Ah, my dear young lady," said the surgeon, "what is there, indeed? Who knows the things that turn life into bitterness for many a fine young fellow besides Philip Rawlston? We can only guess, and learn wisdom by our mistakes, and hope that a sound constitution will help him to surmount all his ills of heart or lungs." Here he looked intently in her face, and then added a parting shot: "If he does not improve in a day or two I shall operate."

Priscilla hurried away.

"That saucy old person meant to insinuate—" she began, and then stopped to ring her own doorbell without putting the insinuation into plain speech; but she knew, all the same, and many things that bore out the supposition flashed into her mind.

In a certain way the idea was not new to her. She had told herself once, in her anger against her stepmother, that part of the scheme to control her money was in order to force her into a marriage with Philip, but even at that moment of hot rebellion she had known it wasn't true. McBride's picture was a very different one; it was a hopeless, self-contained lover who expected nothing, and only asked for news of her when he hoped to lighten her sorrows. How consistently kind he had been! She recalled the scene in the conserva-

tory at the Ingots' ball when she had dropped the bracelet in the fountain, and Philip had clasped it on her arm and promised her his friendship. There it was this minute, under her black sleeve, speaking its kindly message. Then she remembered the night at the opera when she had eyes and ears for no one but Bassford, and she wouldn't listen to Philip's entreaty that she wouldn't hunt—and the result. That he had borne the outcome of her folly, giving her the safe horse while he rode the poor beast that had nearly killed himself and his rider.

Still, even suppose she were right in fancying Philip cared for her, she didn't see how McBride knew, unless perhaps in delirium Philip had betrayed secrets he would give his life to guard. She hated to think of herself as bringing unhappiness to this best of good comrades; and the next minute she called herself a conceited prig to imagine a man like Philip in love with her just because he was chivalrously kind, and because that fanciful old goose, McBride, chose to talk in riddles. She had better apply herself to some obligations that were staring her in the face; an apology to her stepmother, for example, that had been too long delayed.

Her conscience had made her spell submission, and, like Mr. Squeers, exacted a practical proof of the lesson learned. In her own room she began a letter.

"My dear Mrs. Vyner:"

But she got no further; it looked so cold and formal that it chilled her warmth of expression, and yet what else could she say? She wasn't a young child to accept a new mother, and she couldn't call her Katherine, as if they were of the same age.

She tore the sheet in small fragments, and rang the bell.

"Lunch at once," she said to the servant who answered it. "And say to Miss Goring that I shall be obliged if she will get ready to go with me to Willowbrook this afternoon. Oh, yes"—in answer to a question—"we shall be home in time for dinner."

CHAPTER XII.

"Gorry," said Priscilla, as the station carryall jogged over the Willowbrook plains toward the Nugent place, "would you mind having an insatiate craving to explore the surrounding scenery by means of this carriage, while I go in to talk to Mrs. Vyner?"

"Really," said Miss Goring, bridling, "I cannot see what you should have to say to Mrs. Vyner that I cannot hear; and indeed I don't see why you wanted to come at all! I am sure telephoning twice a day to ask about Mr. Rawlston is enough interest for any young woman to display in a gentleman not related to her by blood, without visiting the house as well."

Priscilla forbore further discussion, knowing that Miss Goring would do exactly as she was told in spite of her protests. So the younger lady alighted, and the elder one drove away with a sulky hunch to her back and a sinking at her stomach, which had been set for a cup of tea, and resented the disappointment.

Houses reflect the tastes and characteristics of their possessors with chameleon-like fidelity. Mrs. Nugent's house in the two weeks of Mrs. Vyner's occupation had undergone a complete metamorphosis. The furniture was the same, the carpets, the walls all spoke Mrs. Nugent's florid taste, but the impression of rather cheap luxury had given place to solid comfort, and pretty disorder to severe neatness. Priscilla felt the change and was glad; she welcomed anything that dissociated the house with the eventful visit she had paid to it three weeks before.

The servant who opened the door was Philip's own man, and he volunteered the information that Mrs. Vyner was sitting with Mr. Rawlston, but he was sure she would see Miss Vyner.

The thought that flashed through the girl's mind was that Philip would know she was there, and she hoped—albeit rather faintly—that he would ask to see her.

There was a rustle, the parlor curtains parted, and Mrs. Vyner came in,

a striking figure in her widow's dress. With a vivid remembrance of their last interview she hardly knew how to receive her stepdaughter. Personally, she had not spoken to Priscilla since their parting in Mr. Holden's presence. The inquiries by telephone in regard to Philip had been answered by a servant or a trained nurse, and while Mrs. Vyner felt grateful for the interest shown, she was well aware that the girl's anxiety for the man who had come to grief in her service did not extend to the mother who had enforced disagreeable restrictions upon her liberty. It was therefore a surprise to find her hand taken, while a contrite voice exclaimed:

"I've been a horrid little beast, Mrs. Vyner. If you can forgive me, I wish you would—if you can't, all that I can do is to try to prove by my conduct that I am not as wicked as I seemed."

"You never were a beast, my dear," said Mrs. Vyner, smiling faintly, "and I told you in my letter that I considered myself sincerely and affectionately your friend"—she hesitated for a moment—"even if, as a matter of conscience, I have to let you marry Lord Bassford on your own small income I can still be your friend. You are generous enough to understand that."

For the first time Priscilla realized that Mrs. Vyner's knowledge of her affairs terminated with her own interview with Lord Bassford the afternoon when the will had been read. It made the confession a trifle harder.

"I don't want to marry Lord Bassford," she said, while the tears gathered. "It has nothing to do with money as far as I am concerned—but I know now I should not have been happy with him, and I thank papa for taking care of me, and you for your courage in standing out against me; and oh! oh!" she broke off, mopping her eyes, "I didn't mean to make a scene."

Mrs. Vyner put her arm around the girl, and held her close.

"Let us hope," she said, "that he knows you understand. Yours was the last name on his lips before he became

unconscious. You were his idol, Priscilla."

She put herself aside with a generosity that won the girl's admiration.

"And I failed him!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "I ought to have believed he knew best, and instead, I said angry things, and chose my own way, and hated every one who opposed me, and I am glad I am punished!" she wound up, looking vindictively at her tear-stained face in the glass.

"Have you been very unhappy, poor little girl?" asked Mrs. Vyner. "Has Lord Bassford been unkind?"

Priscilla thought for a moment, before she answered.

"He has been his own accuser—just as you said; and I despise him with my mind, but my heart is very sore. The Bassford I was in love with was a man and a gentleman, and the real Bassford seems to have been something quite different—something I don't like to think about—it makes me ashamed."

There was a knock at the door; a nurse begged a word with Mrs. Vyner, and Priscilla walked to the window and looked out. Philip's servant was throwing a ball for a wiry little Irish terrier, while a common cat from her vantage point on the top of the garden summer-house looked complacently down on the games enacted for her benefit. Priscilla took in the scene with the surface of her brain, while she tried to hold back the flood of painful images the conversation had called up.

Mrs. Vyner came back with a countenance of distress.

"Priscilla," she said, "Philip has sent to beg you will not leave the house without seeing him. I cannot disguise from myself that he is very ill—sometimes all my courage goes, and I fear fatally ill"—she stopped to steady her voice, "but it hasn't come to that yet," she added, more cheerfully. "What McBride especially wishes is to avoid excitement, and I don't know what to do. If I refuse to let him see you, it will throw him into a fever of disappointment, and if I let you go in, it is equally dangerous. He has worried now for ten days over the injustice—as he considers it—

of your father's will. He believes you should be allowed to marry Lord Bassford, who he thinks would make you happy in spite of all I was able to tell him of your father's disapproval, and yet——" she hesitated. "Sometimes I think if you did marry him it would kill Philip."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Priscilla. "He doesn't care for me in that way—indeed you are mistaken. Please let me see him, dear Mrs. Vyner—I shall not agitate him."

Mrs. Vyner led the way. The room was flooded with afternoon sunshine—a little table by the bed held a clock, and a book, and a long, slim document that somehow carried Priscilla's mind back to her interview with Mr. Holden. The nurse, who had arisen when the visitors came in, vanished at a hint from Mrs. Vyner.

Philip was thin to emaciation, but a brilliant spot burned in each cheek, and his expression showed keen interest in what was happening. A white flannel jacket was buttoned across his chest, and the lack of color in his surroundings seemed to add to the delicacy of his appearance. Everything about him testified to the exquisite care of his mother's nursing.

"Are two people too many for you?" asked Mrs. Vyner. "Would you like to see her alone?"

His smile spoke his gratitude, and Mrs. Vyner left the room with the warning:

"Only five minutes, Phil."

There was a chair by the bedside, and Priscilla seated herself with a shy embarrassment. People had been putting ideas in her head, and making her self-conscious in regard to this friend of hers, who, far from seeming like a lover, impressed her as already within the shadow of the world where such things are forgotten.

There was no embarrassment on his part; he greeted her as if they had met but yesterday.

"They won't let me talk much," he said, "so forgive my brusqueness. I know all about your money troubles, Priscilla, and I think it is thundering

hard luck—though I am sure your father meant to do the right thing—and I wish my mother had not been made trustee. I can't imagine how she could have been so short-sighted. She might have known it would end any decent feeling between you and her! Stop a moment," he said, seeing Priscilla about to uphold his mother; "it was her fault inasmuch as she did not absolutely decline the position, and therefore it is my right to undo, as far as I can, her mistake."

He reached out his hand, and took up the document Priscilla had noticed on his table.

"This is my will—I have left you every cent I have in the world, and though it is not much compared with what is kept from you, still it is enough to make a good bit of difference to you and Bassford while you are kept out of income."

Priscilla only took in the beginning of his sentence—his will; every cent he had in the world!—then he thought he was going to die!

She took his hand in both of hers, and held it tight.

"Don't imagine foolish things about your health, Philip," she began, nervous with fear. But again he interrupted:

"The five minutes are nearly gone, and I have so much to say. I know more about my health than the doctors can tell me, and I can promise you that I am not going to keep you out of the property very long, though you needn't tell my mother so. If Bassford——"

Priscilla laid her cheek against the hand she was holding.

"My dear boy," she said, "everything is over between Bassford and me. I wouldn't marry him if I had all my own money and yours, too."

"You have quarreled?" he asked, and his voice seemed toneless and flat.

"It is no lovers' quarrel, if that is what you mean," she replied. "It is simply that he himself opened my eyes to his own character. I don't feel as you do about my father's will and your mother's share in it—I am thankfully glad the money was left just that way, and I'm only sorry—pshaw! sorry isn't

the word—I am miserable and ashamed to have been such a fool."

Philip was lying back among his pillows evidently exhausted, but a smile of raillery played about his lips.

"We must make the best of our mistakes," he said. "Here have I been fancying I was putting the very button on your cap of fortune, and all the time I've been hanging fool's bells on my own."

"It isn't pretty manners to call yourself a fool for being my friend," she said, between smiles and tears. "I may not need your money—you are going to keep that yourself for many a long day—but I shall always need your kindness, dear Philip."

Mrs. Vyner came into the room with her watch in her hand.

"Miss Goring has come back, and is having a cup of tea in the other room, and I am afraid Priscilla must leave you if she wants to catch her train. I have been very merciful to you, Philip; I have given you ten minutes instead of five."

On the doorstep Priscilla held up her face to be kissed with the same yearning for love that a naughty child feels who has been punished and forgiven.

"I hate to go," she said.

Mrs. Vyner kissed her, and answered, almost shyly:

"If Philip improves, perhaps you will come down to stay, and help me to amuse him."

"If Philip improves," Priscilla repeated it to herself, and decided that a man of Philip's will power could make himself get well; and Mrs. Vyner also said the words over, and thought that if anything could give her boy the brace he so sorely needed it would be the knowledge that Priscilla had turned to them for comfort, and that Lord Bassford was on his way to his own place—and she didn't mean Bassingdean.

At the Willowbrook station Priscilla was annoyed to find she had happened upon a train which was patronized by the hunting people after a run, and that Dicky McMann was prominent on the platform. He at once attached himself to her and Miss Goring.

"Splendid run to-day," he said, addressing Miss Goring. "Did you happen to be following?"

He alluded to the habit of the Willowbrook ladies of driving along the roads to see the fun, but Miss Goring thought he discovered in her the makings of a horsewoman.

"I haven't tried horseback riding for some years," she said, "though when I was in England, thirty years ago, plenty of ladies older than I am now were riding, and very nice they looked, too, with their long skirts and black beaver hats."

"Why, you're a real sport, Miss Goring," said Dicky, with enthusiasm. "Now you come down next Saturday, and I'll mount you on The Smasher, and I'll bet you'll lead the field."

"Isn't the name a trifle formidable?" asked Miss Goring.

"Well, then, on Apollyon, unless you find his name too devilish!" Here he got frightened, and said to Priscilla, in a low voice: "Suppose she took me at my word, wouldn't I be in a fix just! Old lady something of a wag, hey? Then it's all right; I was getting a bit worried for fear she might fancy herself in the saddle."

In the train he couldn't get a seat near Priscilla, but he stood in the aisle talking to her half the way to town. A most exhaustive account of the day's sport, which had been slightly marred by an accident to one of the whips, reminded him of Philip.

"Poor old Rawlston, I hear it's about even betting on him. McBride went down in the train with me yesterday, and he said he had about made up his mind to operate. By Jove, what a blood-curdling way those knife fellows have of talking! They think no more of making a hole in a fellow's ribs, than they would in a muskmelon, and when they've carved you up to suit themselves you might better be dead, for you've nothing left to live on—takes every cent you have to pay their bills. For my part I think horses have the best time—they're fit or they're dead. I declare I've made you quite pale."

Priscilla was glad to get the conversation away from Philip's condition, and

she asked Mr. McMann what women had been hunting.

He mentioned two or three, and wound up with Mrs. Nugent.

"Would you believe she did the whole run—didn't funk a fence, and went like a bird. I never half appreciated that woman till to-day! She wants me to take a place at Blankhampton this summer, and get some hounds down there for September. Maybe I will if I can get a good place for the kennels back in the hills. Will you come and stay with me, Miss Vyner? Perhaps Mrs. Vanderlyn will come, too; Mrs. Nugent's sort o' young to play chaperone, isn't she?"

There was a conscious grin on his face that made Priscilla suspect she was already superseded in his affections by the sporting widow.

"Blankhampton," she repeated. "I wonder whether Mrs. Vyner would think well of it for Philip. Willowbrook will soon be too warm, and he could not stand a longer journey. Perhaps we may take a cottage there ourselves."

This was the very place of lonely pools and dreary sea beach that her imagination had pictured as so desirable a retreat for a crushed spirit; and now—though little real change had taken place in the conditions of her life—her fancy gave her quite a different impression of its moorland and ocean. In her mind's eye, she saw groups of sun-burned children digging in the sands or paddling in the spent breakers; women in their gay summer frocks under the shade of huge umbrellas; while from the water the laughter of the bathers sounded shrill above the roar of the surf. Even the pools became gay with hedges of marshmallow, and the slender shaft of a distant lighthouse spoke of safety to the mariners rather than of the treachery of the shoals.

Priscilla's thoughts had been on a little pleasure trip, and they came back with a start to hear Dicky McMann saying:

"I always found Bassford a decentish sort of pal, and I can't think why people are suddenly so down on him. Not

that it matters much, for they say he's safe to marry Lady Pengordon as soon as Pengordon gets comfortable and snoozy in his grave, and I don't believe either of them will want to come back here. You don't mind an old friend saying that, all the same, he wasn't good enough for you, Miss Vyner."

"I think I do mind, Mr. McMann," said Priscilla, coloring. "It isn't pleasant to have your name coupled with any man's, especially when there's not the slightest interest on either side."

If Dicky had been alone he would have given vent to a long whistle of incredulity, but as they were now walking out of the station at Long Island City, he sensibly beat a retreat.

"There's a hansom," he said. "It is rather a piece of luck to get one on this side, so if you'll excuse me, I'll just nip into it before that fat old gentleman catches cabby's eye. You have your own trap on the other side? Ta-ta."

"Good-by," she called. "If you hear of anything particularly desirable in Blankhampton, let me know."

CHAPTER XIII.

June found Mrs. Vyner established at Blankhampton with her son and step-daughter.

They had a cottage directly on the dunes, overlooking a vast expanse of ocean—indeed, there was nothing but ocean between them and the shores of Haiti, as they had occasion to remember from time to time when a West Indian cyclone came scurrying northward, and dashed its half-spent fury on their beach. There were storms later in the summer when the waves almost played Canute with the piazza chairs, and made Mrs. Vyner admire the superior acumen of Mr. Dicky McMann, who had taken the next place, with a lawn of two hundred feet between him and the sand hills, so that he could afford to smile at the raging of the sea.

It had been a spring of alternate hope and fear in regard to Philip, and finally

McBride fulfilled his threat and operated. Happily, the result justified his judgment, for the lung healed promptly and vigorously, and Philip showed an eagerness to get well in marked contrast to the lethargy of the early days of his illness.

The moment convalescence was really established Priscilla took up her residence with Mrs. Vyner, and together they nursed, and petted, and—if the truth were told—shamelessly bullied Philip until he grew strong enough to assert himself. And, best of all, they learned to love each other, and set up a little millenium that made the desert and solitary places in their hearts blossom like the rose, and Philip's seemed to be the hand that led them.

At Blankhampton their quiescent invalid began to find his spirit and defied his womenkind in a manner that caused the keenest anxiety. The first time he chose to take a swim in the surf they were positively wounded and tried his sweet temper to the utmost. On the occasion of his initial ride, Mrs. Vyner was openly in tears, and Priscilla said that if he chose to be selfish enough to add to his mother's unhappiness she had nothing to say—but she did think he might consider *her* feelings. But the crowning blow was when he and Dicky McMann got a sailboat—a sixty footer—which they kept in Peconic Bay, and went off in it for cruises of two or three days at a time; then the gloom that settled on the Blankhampton cottage was akin to despair.

In this way Philip's health, Philip's comfort, Philip's fancies dominated Priscilla's life, and quite insensibly filled her heart to the exclusion of all other interests. She read aloud to him, or she did her own reading in order to discuss with him what he valued; she drove with him, or they played piquet by the hour. Mrs. Vyner wondered whether she were justified in letting things drift, and decided that her scruples shamed her. Why should money stand between Priscilla and the best man and gentleman she knew? Besides, after all, the girl might not care

for him except as a friend and half-brother in spite of her devotion.

Toward the end of August, Dicky had a house party. Mrs. Vanderlyn came over from Newport to Sag Harbor in her husband's yacht, and was fetched from there to Blankhampton by Mr. McMann in his new automobile; and Mrs. Nugent came from the Adirondacks and several men arrived to do some hunting with Dicky in September, and the days were not long enough for all their scamperings over the country.

Priscilla's mourning prevented her joining in any social gayeties, but she rode, and drove, and bathed, and sailed, and grew strong and rosy, and Philip's soul was filled with a great contentment. The present was his to enjoy, even if the future held nothing more. At least her sorrows were healing. It never occurred to him to make love to her; all that he hoped, so far, was that she should forget.

By the time of the McMann house party, she had so far forgotten, that she was surprisingly ready to be amused, and Mrs. Nugent told Mrs. Vanderlyn that she feared dear Priscilla had rather a light nature, for her mourning seemed very inadequate for a father, and the way she carried on in the water the day they all rowed out to the sail boat in their bathing dresses, and went overboard and swam ashore, was simply noisy.

"You don't swim, do you?" said Mrs. Vanderlyn, looking at her, as was her custom, through half-closed lids. "It makes quite a difference in the point of view whether one is active or passive."

"If you mean by passive, knowing how to behave myself, I hope I am!" she answered, primly.

"Oh, don't be a cat!" said Mrs. Vanderlyn. "One would hardly suppose you had been jolting about the country till one o'clock last night with Dicky in his motor. If you call that knowing how to behave yourself, commend me to Priscilla!"

Mrs. Nugent, who really had a good heart—at least as good a one as is consistent with a confirmed habit of backbiting—said that Priscilla was a darling,

and she couldn't help hoping she would marry that nice creature Philip Rawlston, who would make an ideal husband if he didn't develop consumption.

"Consumption be hanged!" cried Mrs. Vanderlyn, in sudden wrath. "Don't dare put such a thought in his head or any one else's, and for pity's sake don't go and spoil a pretty romance by opening Priscilla's eyes to it before the time." She thinks now her affections are blighted forever, whereas I think they are stretching out their tendrils in the properest manner imaginable."

"Blighted!" repeated Mrs. Nugent. "Who blighted them? If you mean Lord Bassford, I happen to know that he would never have attached himself to Polly Pengordon if he hadn't been refused by quite a different person," and she looked conscious.

Mrs. Vanderlyn turned on her heel and left her, murmuring, as she went: "She has said that so often that I almost begin to believe it; but it can't be true. She hasn't got the money, and, besides, she is just the kind of woman to suppose love-making means matrimony."

The last day in August broke hot and sultry; clouds banked themselves up everywhere, and yet did not obscure the sun, and the air was heavy and oppressive.

Mrs. Vyner had taken an early train to town to attend to some legal business, and Priscilla, in her white dress, was busying herself about the house until Philip should come down. Breakfast in his room was the only invalid habit he retained. He had not come in from a dinner the night before until after the entire household had gone to bed, and was consequently ignorant of his mother's sudden and energetic resolution of going to town, till a note, which she had left, was brought to him on his breakfast tray.

MY DEAR PHIL: Mr. Holden thinks it better for me to go to town to sign those leases, and very annoying I find it.

I am sorry to leave Priscilla unchaperoned, especially at this time when one has to take

into account the unbridled tongues of the ladies next door.

Take yourself off for the day, will you, so as to give no occasion for gossip. I shall be home at 5:30.

Ever yours,
K. V.

Priscilla knew nothing of this note, and was looking forward to a long, undisturbed day of Philip's company. There was an unconventionality in their being left to take care of each other for the day that amused and pleased her. She stood arranging some flowers and wondering what orders Philip would have for the stable. Really, they might be old married people having thus to consult each other about domestic details—and Priscilla's smile proved the idea at least diverting.

She heard his door open, his quick step on the stairs, and then a cough!

It was a very ordinary little cough, but it was the sound she had learned to dread.

"You won't play tennis to-day, will you, Philip?" she begged. "You are sure to get overheated, and then plunge in the ocean, and already you've taken cold."

Philip was just going to defend himself against the charge of imprudence, and to explain that his day's programme led him over the hills and far away to the Golf Club, when Dicky McMann appeared.

"Look here, Miss Vyner," he began, "my boarders say they're going to stick to their boarding house to-day, and maybe take a dip before lunch right out here in my water front, and they want you and Philip to come over and play bridge."

"Sorry," said Philip, shortly, "I have another engagement."

Priscilla looked at him pleadingly, bridge would at least keep him out of the hot sun.

Dicky turned to pat his dog, and Priscilla whispered: "Why won't you, Philip?"

"I hate the game," he said, which was true, but he hated still more going off for the day, and the constraint he put upon himself made him ungracious.

Again he coughed, and Priscilla forgot tact in anxiety.

"Then promise to stay in the house all day, and keep out of draughts," she said, abandoning the bridge.

"I have an engagement at the Golf Club," he answered, quickly, and Dicky McMann dug him in the ribs, and exclaimed:

"I'm on to you, old man! She asked me, too, but I refused, and devilish glad I am that I did this broiling day. You might as well give up lecturing him, Miss Vyner; there is a mighty pretty woman giving a lunch there to-day, and I guess cart ropes wouldn't hold him back when Mrs. Banker beckons."

Philip said nothing, and Priscilla felt her heart swell with wounded pride. For months she had nursed and watched over Philip; if he had been her own brother she could not have done more for him, and the first little favor she asked of him he refused for the sake of that horrid, common, noisy Mrs. Banker. Priscilla grew very distant in her manner.

"Good-by, Philip," she said. "I shall go with Mr. McMann. Perhaps you will send word to the stable that your mother is to be met at half-past five."

She crossed the lawn beside Dicky, with her head in the air, and a suggestion of temper in the way she drew in her lips.

Philip looked after her, half amused, half annoyed.

"Bless the child," he thought, "that was quite a flash of the old-time Priscilla. I wonder whether she really believes I am lunching with that stupid woman."

Meanwhile Priscilla reached Dicky's cottage, and made her way through the semi-darkness of closed shutters and dropped awnings to the cool drawing-room.

Two bridge tables were set out, and the company impatiently waiting.

"Where is Mr. Rawlston?" asked Mrs. Vanderlyn, and Dicky McMann replied:

"Oh! he has caught the Banker fever like the rest of the Blankhampton men, and is going to drive over to the Golf

Club through this blazing heat. Miss Vyner did her best to dissuade him, but all in vain."

"I expected better taste from Mr. Rawlston," said Mrs. Vanderlyn, "but men are all alike—they only care for fun on broad lines, and she can furnish that! She mixes their drinks, and tells them stories that make *me* blush—and that's saying a good deal. I only indicate a naughty fact—she strips it."

Priscilla sat down at a table, and took up the cards. The conversation made her irritable and uncomfortable, and she was afraid of what the chaperone might say next. She eagerly welcomed the silence of the game.

It began, and at the end of the first rubber, a loud growl of thunder made itself heard. At the end of half an hour the noise was incessant, and the sea began roaring in a way that rivaled the thunder. Finally it became so dark that Dicky rang for lights, but Mrs. Vanderlyn declared the day of judgment should not find her at the card table, and she pushed back her chair, and went out on the piazza.

A thunderstorm from the west had met the clouds from over the sea, and a grand cannonading was going on.

Priscilla thought of Philip with a weight of responsibility that overcame her anger. He had started out in a run-about, with no protection from sun or rain. Mrs. Vyner would be sure to think she might have taken better care of him. She even hoped Mrs. Banker had him safe in the shelter of the clubhouse.

She was forced to stay to lunch, for the downpour was continuous. After an hour the wind backed around to the east, and the thunder ceased, only to give place to a settled howling gale with sheets of rain one minute and none at all the next.

Mr. McMann, who couldn't stand being shut up in the house for three hours, was preparing to go out and look at the sea.

"Regular August twister," he said, putting on a most unbecoming suit of oilskins with the help of his solemn butler. "That's what they call them down

here. They say the sea gets such a side set that the waves are tumbling over each other every which way at once, and any little trifles lying loose about the beach, like bathhouses or arbors or boardwalks, are ripped up and smashed before you can say Jack Robinson! Can I do anything for you, Miss Vyner—do you want a trap from my stable or yours?"

She asked for her own brougham, and when it came drove home for a moment only, to get Philip's topcoat and pick up Billy Jenkins on the box.

She confided her plan to Plummer. She was going to the Golf Club for Mr. Rawlston, trusting she should find him safely housed—but if on the contrary he were driving home in his open trap through the rain, she would make him get in with her, and put on a dry coat, and give up his horse and wagon to Billy Jenkins. Her spirits rose as she started on her expedition to rescue Philip from his own folly.

The roads were flooded, the rain beat so against the windows she could hardly see what was passing, and her progress was slow.

They had gone about three miles, when they came to a broken culvert which stretched so nearly across the road that only one carriage could pass safely at a time, and this narrow causeway was already usurped by a surrey with its leather curtains buttoned tight.

Billy Jenkins had sharp eyes; in the far recesses of the back seat he spied Mr. Rawlston in company with a lady, and quick as thought Billy was off his box, and standing in the middle of the road.

The surrey came to a stop, Philip's voice demanded what was the matter, and Billy's shrill pipe answered that Mr. Rawlston's carriage was there to take him home. There was a short parley; evidently the lady was loath to surrender her companion, and it was equally evident that Philip intended to leave her. But Priscilla, who heard the tones of Mrs. Banker's voice, was enraged to find herself in the position of snatching Rawlston from her carriage; and she shrank into the corner of the

brougham, hoping she might not be noticed by the lady.

Philip was by this time standing in the rain, his thin coat getting drenched, while Mrs. Banker made reproachful adieus.

Jenkins held open the door of the brougham, and Philip, all unconscious of Priscilla's presence, sprang in, and almost fell over her.

"My dear little girl," he exclaimed, "this is an unexpected pleasure! How did such a gracious thought come into your head?"

Priscilla tossed her curly mane.

"I needed exercise," she said, defiantly. "The thought seems to have been rather unfortunate, since it spoiled your *tête-à-tête* drive with Mrs. Banker."

"Did you really believe Dicky McMann's nonsense about my lurching with her?" asked Philip, half amused.

Priscilla nodded, and looked out of the window.

"I did not lunch with her," Philip continued, "and I wasn't even invited, but I was more than glad to come home with her, because she had the only covered trap at the club, and you said I was not to take cold. Don't I always try to please you, Priscilla?"

"Really, I don't know," returned Priscilla, haughtily. "You do not always succeed."

"Of that I am aware. Though why I fail, is often a mystery to me."

"Is it a mystery that I am not pleased at your leaving the house when your health requires you to stay at home, for no reason that I can imagine, except a wish to avoid me?"

"You have hit upon the truth," answered Philip, delighted to detect a childish tremor in her dignified tone. "I went to avoid you." She turned to him quickly, but he would not let her speak. "No, I am not in fun, I assure you."

There was a pause. Priscilla's eyes questioned him with not very well concealed alarm, but after a moment she managed to say, with a fine air of indifference: "It is a pity my society is so disagreeable to you, because, situated as

we are, we seem likely to spend a good deal of time together for the rest of our lives."

"No, we do not," he returned, emphatically.

At this, the dignity was actually startled out of her.

"Philip, what do you mean?" she cried, piteously.

"I mean that we shall see each other not at all or all the time. Which strikes you as most likely? I can't and won't stand any more of this sort of thing. Flesh and blood could not bear it. I

go away entirely, or I have you for my very own."

"Oh," she said, with something approaching a sob, "how could you frighten me so! I thought you did not care."

"Which is it to be, Priscilla?"

"It is to be just whatever I like," answered Priscilla, willfully. "Only you are not to go away entirely."

And fortunately the rain was thick on the windows so that no passer-by was witness of the kiss with which her words were greeted.



THE PRESAGE OF MARY

O HUSH Thee, rest Thee, little son
 Within my sheltering arm,
 It stirs the very heart of me
 To feel Thee, soft and warm.
 No sleep may touch my eyes to-night:
 The lamp of love burns all too bright.

The marvel of Thy tiny hand
 (Like rose-leaf held in mine),
 And little feet that press my side
 Thrills in my veins like wine;
 Did woman ever know more bliss
 Than I, when downy head I kiss?

In the long watches of the night
 While all the earth holds breath,—
 I feel the life I gave Thee move,
 And yet I think of Death.
 Ah, me! the fears that mothers know
 Before the break of morning glow!

Lie closer, closer, little son
 Against my throbbing heart—
 What is there in the moaning wind
 To make the quick tears start?—
 A voice it seems that calls to me
 With sorrow fraught, and mystery.

ROSALIE ARTHUR.

A SUBURBAN CHRISTMAS

By Charles Battell Loomis

Author of "Mrs. Bidwell's Tea," "Cheerful Americans," Etc.

WHEN the Raynors lived in the Sherwood in New York there was no one in all the artist colony more popular than they.

Raynor will never jostle Velasquez for first place as a painter, but I doubt if Velasquez was as fine a man as Raynor, and even those who smile at the latter's figure work and screech at his landscapes, cheerfully indorse the general verdict that "Billy is all right."

And Mrs. Raynor—well, there's no use trying to describe her to an apathetic world, because if you don't know her you can't begin to imagine how nice she is.

As a general thing in a family made up of an artist and his wife, it is the artist who does the heavy hoping, while the wife, looking at life in the light of bitter experience, wishes that her husband had a good job in the ferryhouse at so much a week, and if he lives in roomy air castles she is very apt to live in the small rooms for which they struggle to pay rent. I refer to the early years of successful artists and all the years of unsuccessful ones.

But Raynor and his wife are the original packages as far as hope is concerned. He is always sure that monumental success is coming to him week after week; she is just as sure that it will arrive early next week, and between the two of them they manufacture cheerfulness in large quantities and hand it out to their friends with prodigal generosity. No tea or lunch or supper of a bohemian nature ever took place in the Sherwood without finding the Raynors among the guests.

So when they decided to leave New

York and take up a residence "way out in Jersey," gloom fell upon their friends among the artists, and although I am not an artist, gloom fell upon me. For I have numbered Mr. and Mrs. Billy Raynor among my friends, lo! these many years.

They moved into their new house in October, and a few days afterward I received a letter from Billy, which ran as follows:

DEAR HUBERT: I always hoped that heaven would be my home eventually, but I never supposed it would be located here. Yet such is the fact. We are only two minutes from the train, and to make it better yet, I only have to go to town once a week. The real country is five minutes from us on foot, two minutes on a wheel. We have gas, electricity and a furnace, and we think we are going to get coal.

This last is quite heavenly, because our next door neighbors on either side think they are not going to get any, owing to its scarcity and a little trouble they have had with their coal dealer. Never quarrel with a coal dealer.

I can get more paintable views in a morning than I can paint in a week, and Anna says she feels better here than she ever imagined anybody could feel anywhere short of Paradise.

You ought to come out here and settle. Only forty dollars for eight rooms and a bath, a stable and half an acre of ground with roses and honeysuckle in the summer and hens if we want them—and I think we will. Twenty-five miles from New York, and they tell me that mosquitoes are only troublesome for a certain length of time.

If you don't hear from me again, come out to spend Christmas day with us. We will invite some of the boys from the Sherwood, and we'll have a good time—Christmas tree and all the fixings.

Have gained five pounds since I left New York, and I'm afraid to have Anna weighed, as I have a feeling that a perfect wife should not weigh more than one hundred and twenty-five pounds, and she weighed one

hundred and twenty-four before we came out. How any one can live in the city who has had a taste of suburban life I don't see. And to think that I have spent thirty years in New York.

Come out any time and spend Sunday, but be sure to save Christmas, anyway.

Yours, way up in G,

WILLIAM RAYNOR.

A very characteristic letter, and it made me want to go out and see him, but I had an unusually busy fall, and I was unable to think of it until Christmas time.

Then I inquired among the Sherwooders and found that although a number of them had received the same general invitation, only one was going out. The country in winter has terrors for the average city man.

But Tom Somers, whose "Winter Evening" gained him the Hallgarten prize in—I forgot the date—and who paints out of doors in weather that would freeze the fingers of most men, said he was going and we planned to go together.

We had expected to go out Christmas morning, but a business matter requiring instant attention came up, and as Tom did not want to go out alone he waited for me, and it was four o'clock before we started and twilight was beginning to fall.

We bore packages of a Christmas character, and I took the precaution to carry along a bottle of whiskey, because if there's anything the matter with a furnace in a country house and you don't care to wear your overcoat indoors, a judicious use of hot water with the proper flavor is sometimes a preventor of doctor's visits.

Tom and I are not what you'd call drinking men, but we did stop in at a café on our way down Cortlandt Street to the station, and had a glass of Christmas cheer. Only one, but it made us both feel well disposed toward the world, and I think that the newsboy on the corner was glad that we used that particular ferry. And he didn't forget to say "Thank you" either.

"I'm sorry more of the fellows didn't come out with us," said Tom, as we

lighted our cigars in a warm corner of the men's cabin. "Billy is always good company, but in his own house he will surpass himself, and his wife is a born housekeeper. The dinner will be something just a little different from any other. She has a knack that way. You know Billy's always wanted to live out of town, and I got a letter from him in November that told me he was as happy as he was the day Anna accepted him, and that Anna was happier. I've been meaning to go out, but one thing or another has prevented me."

"Same here," said I. "Yes, the boys missed it not going out. If Billy had as much talent as he has good feeling, he'd be one of our leading painters."

"Poor Billy," said Tom, shaking his head compassionately. "He can't paint a little bit, and yet he contrives to sell something every once in a while, and I guess that Anna has a little coming to her from her mother's estate, so there's no danger of their starving. They're the salt of the earth, and they deserve more than they get."

We reached Airy Park in good season, but there was no one to meet us. A moment's reflection showed me that it was unreasonable to expect to be met, as Billy didn't even know we were coming. I had meant to write him, but I'd forgotten it, and Tom never writes a letter from one year's end to another.

There was no sleigh at the station, but the agent told us that it was the seventh house straight ahead.

It seemed a long two minutes from the station, but perhaps that was because the snow was so deep and the wind so piercing. The cars had been very cold, and the good cheer we had imbibed in Cortlandt Street had not sufficed to keep us warm for more than halfway, and we did not take the roseate view of the world that had been ours when we started.

"Airy Park," said Tom, with a shiver. "I don't see the park, but it's airy all right. I feel as if my overcoat was made of mosquito netting."

"But there aren't any mosquitoes," said I. "First time I ever found them absent from their posts."

"Boy, what's the matter with the electric lights?" asked Tom of a small boy just as we passed a globe that was shrouded in gloom.

"There was an accident at the power house in Rahway this afternoon, and they're cut off."

"Oh, that's all," said Tom.

"Billy wrote me he had gas as well," said I, "so he's all right. Electric lights are a luxury, anyway."

We now arrived at Billy's house. At least it was the seventh house from the station. The snow lay deep all around it, and no track led to or from it. Billy and his wife had evidently spent the day indoors. We plowed our way to the piazza and then noticed that there was no light inside, and the frost on the parlor windows looked arctic in its construction.

"Must be pretty cold inside," said I. "I wonder if this is Billy's. Maybe it's a vacant house."

The wind wheeued and wheeued and we shivered and shivered as we walked to the door and pressed the electric bell.

"Did that ring?" asked Tom. "I didn't hear it."

"Neither did I, but probably it's in the kitchen. Try it again."

He pressed it with a lingering touch and we listened for the sound of it, but heard nothing except the howling of the storm.

"Brrrrrh!" shivered Tom. "I'm going to have a chill in the most comfortable chair in the house as soon as Billy opens the door. This is the coldest ever. We'd make good models for a *Puck* artist."

A thermometer hung by the door, and just for curiosity I illuminated the evening's blackness with a match and learned that we were in a zero temperature.

"It's Billy's thermometer," said Tom. "He's had it ever since I knew him, so this is the house, but maybe they've gone to a neighbor's to dinner."

"That's a beautiful thought. What will poor Robin do then, poor thing?"

"I thought I heard voices. Probably the bell's out of order. They always are."

As he spoke he pounded with both fists on the glass of the door, and in a minute we heard steps in the house, and then a glimmer of light and then Billy's well-known voice cried out to some one at a distance.

"Some one has come. Hurrah!"

And then Billy opened the door, and as he did so the wind blew out his candle, and we were in darkness again, but in a darkness that was not as chilly as the darkness of outdoors. That is, not *quite* as chilly. There was no wind after the door was shut, but we did not feel any warmth that could be called stimulating.

"Merry Christmas, boys! I saw Tom, but I didn't know who the other man was. Wait till I light the candle. Come down, Anna, we've got company. Awfully glad to see you—or I will be when I get a light."

The candle lighted, Billy—the same old happy-faced Billy, set it down on the hall table and shook hands heartily, and in a moment Anna, her face wreathed in smiles, and her voice laden with Christmas greetings, came downstairs bearing another candle.

"Why, you poor things, you must be frozen. It must be awful in New York," said Anna, as she got a good look at us. "Come into the kitchen."

"Had the gas taken out only yesterday, and to-day the electric light has gone out for the first time since we moved in," said Billy, as cheerily as if he had announced that his uncle had left him a fortune.

"Only two candles in the house, so if you can get along with one until we can send for others—"

"Billy, what makes it so cold?" blurted out Tom.

"The same thing that makes every house in town cold—except Dutcher's boarding house. The coal famine has struck us."

When Billy said this he used just the tone that a man uses when he points out the biggest building in town to you. Billy was evidently proud to belong to a town that boasted but one forehanded man.

We had followed the Raynors into

the kitchen, which was a little warmer than the rest of the house. Still it would have been a good place to keep meat in if a man didn't have a cold cellar or a refrigerator.

"Keep your things on and we'll have a jolly time in spite of the cold. I'll put on my overcoat just to be in the fashion. Do you feel cold, Anna?"

"No, dearie, it takes a good deal to make me cold," said Anna, pulling her golf cape a little closer.

As for me I began to wish that I had not left my snug apartments.

"Anna," said Billy, "we ought to have a grate fire in the parlor to celebrate Christmas with, and do hurry up the dinner."

"I'm cook to-day," said Anna, with a cheery laugh. "All the cooks in town are Slavs, and they've all gone to Newark to a Christmas celebration."

This seemed a fairy story until it was explained that all the Slavs were from the same village and most of them were cousins, and they had a loving habit of taking their holidays together. So every house in Airy Park, with the exception of the boarding house where they employed colored servants, was cookless on this glad Christmas day.

"Don't you want some beer?" asked Billy, as we followed him to the cellar to get some wood to make a fire with.

We felt it was a little cool for beer, and so it proved, for the bottles were frozen solid and two of them had burst.

We found a broken chair in the "wine cellar," and also a box that had contained oranges. These were borne upstairs in triumph, and in a few minutes the chair and box were giving themselves up to make it look warm. That was all it did—look warm. The flames were red and burny-looking, but they gave out no heat in that polar parlor. But I had the presence of mind to open the bottle of whiskey, and then we were in a better case.

"After dinner we'll light the Christmas tree," said Billy. "We half expected some one, and so we made preparations; but when no one came on the three o'clock we gave you up and went

out for a long walk, and we have just enjoyed the bracing weather outdoors."

"A little of it has leaked in, Billy," said Tom, spreading his hands to the blaze and trying to bring his shoulder blades together for warmth.

"It's too bad, old man," said I, "to have anything like this happen to you on Christmas day."

"Why, we like it," said Billy, with every evidence of sincerity. "It adds a spice of excitement to life. Now if we hadn't any chairs to burn it might be different. Awfully thoughtful of you to bring that whiskey. Hadn't a drop in the house."

Tom had given up trying to warm his hands, and he looked pretty glum. I imagine he was thinking of a snug little dinner to which he had been invited.

"How are you going to get dinner if you haven't any coal?" I asked.

"Oh, we've got a quarter of a ton, and Anna is using some of it to get dinner with. We were going to Dutcher's if you hadn't come, but this will be a heap better—"

"Look here," said Tom, "this open fire looks cheery and very Christmassy, but if you want to warm the house, why not burn the wood in the furnace? It'll go ten times as far. I'm really afraid of pneumonia, you know. No end jolly and unusual and all that, but the Sherwood keeps us so infernally warm that I've sort of got into the foolish habit of expecting it, and if you haven't any wood for the furnace I'll have to go to bed to keep warm."

"No, no," said Billy, his face clouding. "Don't think of doing such a thing before dinner. I've got a lot of boxes down cellar and some planks that the men used when they were shingling the roof. We'll have a fire that will make the house seem like midsummer. Come down and help me start it. We'll just picnic, you know. You take me as you find me and we'll have the best time ever."

His cheery good nature was infectious. He poked his head into the kitchen on the way down and said: "Anna, we're going to build a wood fire

in the furnace. Hurry up with your dinner and we'll have a jollier time than any Sherwooders could possibly have."

He continued as we followed him down: "Isn't this a roomy little house? Finely ventilated and everything convenient. Of course this is unusual weather, and this coal famine is unusual, too, but if I had plenty of coal and the weather was warmer it wouldn't be any trouble at all to keep comfortable. We spend most of our time outdoors to save fuel, and it's doing us a world of good. I think we're going to live very economically when we really get down to it. Next month's January, you know, and February's always short, and after March you're well into spring. Oh, we haven't regretted it a minute since we came out here. Awfully glad you came to-night. People here are rather clannish, and I think they don't quite know what to make of an artist, so we haven't gone out much, but I have my painting, and Anna her books and housekeeping, and half the time dinner to busy herself with, and you know she likes nothing better than cooking. If she were stronger we wouldn't have a cook at all. Sometimes I say that all we really have her for is so we can pay her her wages the first of the month."

"Billy," came a voice from above, "where's the turkey. Do you suppose Dagma took it?"

"Why, I don't know, dear. Isn't it in the pantry?"

My heart sank. I was getting hungry in spite of the cold, and my exercise in helping break wood for the fire was adding to my appetite. Pray Heaven they find the turkey. Tom and I exchanged glances. These were two children with their housekeeping, and we were in a fair way to freeze to death and then starve afterward. The wind roared outside with a noise like a heavily-laden freight train on a down grade and full steam on. No, there was no suggestion of steam in the noise. Rapid congelment, but no steam. Still, I was beginning to enjoy myself now that I knew the worst, and I think Tom was. You see, Billy was so human, and he was so

manifestly happy that it would have been downright treacherous to remain gloomy.

A few quick steps on the pantry floor above us and then: "Oh, I've found it, dear. It was behind the refrigerator, and it's frozen solid. What shall I do with it?"

"Bring it down here and we'll thaw it out in the furnace," said Tom.

There was to be a turkey, after all!

We had been chopping wood, or, rather, breaking it by jumping on it, and all by the light of the furnace fire, for Billy had started it as soon as he had broken the first box, and now Anna came down, singing a little Christmas tune, and put the turkey in the open door, and then went upstairs to find some of the other things that were to make up our Christmas feast.

"Isn't it jolly to picnic this way?" said she, with as much ardor as Billy had displayed. "I think there are some cans of soup somewhere, and there's a plum pudding and sweet potatoes, only *they're* very much frozen."

The reader may not believe it, but we were really enjoying ourselves. Our exertions had warmed us, and Billy's imperturbable good spirits were so contagious that nothing could have made us immune.

"God rest you, merry gentlemen," sang Tom as he jumped into a box and nearly dislocated an ankle. "This is really living, Billy. I'm all aglow."

As for me, I found an old sofa by falling headlong across it, and we demolished it like three boys breaking windows in an unused house. The furnace poker was long and strong, and we gave thwacking blows with that and the coal shovel.

"Ram her in," shouted Tom, as the three of us bore the back of the sofa up to the furnace door.

We rammed her in and then ran off for another piece.

"What *are* you men doing down there?" called out Anna, breaking off in the middle of a song.

"Getting up an appetite!" yelled Tom, and started another Christmas song, in which we all joined. It was

"Gather Around the Christmas Tree," and we joined hands and circled around the furnace, roaring it out until Anna came down to see what we were doing, and laughed at us for a parcel of boys.

"That turkey must be thawed by this time," said she.

Tom was in front of the furnace when she spoke, and he let go of our hands and yelled: "Thunder and Mars! Who pushed that turkey in?"

Reader, it was even so. You wondered if the turkey had been forgotten by me as narrator. It had not, but as fuel procurer it had, and we had shoved it into the fiery furnace, and it was even now too far gone to help out our Christmas feast.

Tom began another song of childhood:

"Where, oh where is the Christmas turkey?
Where, oh where is the Christmas turkey?
It has gone to the fiery furnace——"

He broke off and grabbed our hands and again we circled around the furnace, while Anna sat on the cellar stairs and laughed to the verge of hysterics. The mainstay of our dinner was helping heat the house, but we didn't any of us care. We were four children once more, and we gave ourselves up to a wild abandon.

"Stop, stop!" cried Anna, "I'm weak from laughing. You ought to be scolded for burning up that lovely turkey, but we'll get along without it. Come up and help me forage."

Now the destruction of the turkey was a real calamity to me. It was not so much the loss of that much nutriment as the sentiment of the thing. Turkey is as much a part of Christmas as Christmas greens or a tree or presents. But I am man enough to stand even a calamity without blinking, and I joined in the foraging with gusto and tried to forget the incinerated fowl which must have weighed a good twelve pounds and looked to be uncommonly good before it was cremated.

We found half a cold ham and two cans of Kennebec salmon and three cans of soup—bouillon, vegetable and mock turtle.

Tom said: "Combine the three and it will make a rich soup."

I know nothing of the secrets of the kitchen, and the idea was distasteful to me, but Anna is a born cook, and it sounded all right to her. She even added something else to the combination, and I am bound to say that the soup was delicious. We all helped in the operations. Nine women out of ten hate to have any one in the kitchen when they are cooking, but Anna was delighted to have company. She warmed to her work, and at last threw off her golf cape, although I thought it imprudent. Now that my dancing was over I was none too warm, particularly when I heard that long roar of the wind outside.

The dinner, when it was served, was plain and unconventional, but it had a Christmas flavor that all the boarding-house turkeys in the world would not have had.

We ate it right there in the kitchen, and Tom told stories, and Billy sang songs in which the only thing lacking was a voice, and Anna bustled around and waited on us and prepared a brandy sauce for the canned pudding that took it right out of the canned goods class and made it something distinctive.

After dinner we lighted the tree, and I suppose we acted like a pack of children, but we certainly had a good time, and I never thought of the cold weather from the time Anna announced that dinner was ready until it was time to go to bed, somewhere about two o'clock.

Billy had lots of blankets, and he told us to imagine that we were on a Peary expedition, and that was no strain on the imagination at all. There's no particular story about this. It's just a plain account of how I spent Christmas; but I am almost certain that if it had been any other people but Billy and Anna we would have taken the earliest train back to town.

And if the inhabitants of Airy Park don't take up Billy because he is an artist, why so much the worse for the Airy Parkers, for the Raynors can give anybody that Christmas feeling right in the middle of July.

I FIND THE PRINCESS

A CHRISTMAS LOVE STORY

By Ralph Henry Barbour

Author of "The Land of Joy," Etc., Etc.

"I BELIEVE you're the most conceited man I ever knew," said my Sister Phrosia. "You think every woman you meet wants to marry you!"

"Not at all," I corrected, meekly; "I am merely discreet. I fear that I may want to marry every woman—and I avoid temptation!"

"Marcelle Varick is coming to see Lydia and me; she has never seen you; she doesn't know anything about you; she doesn't care to!"

I frowned, and shook my head.

"You should have told her I was to be here," I said, disapprovingly. "You should have prepared her for the risk she is running. Should she fall victim to my charms, and die of unrequited affection, the fault would be yours. It's quite likely she would return here and haunt you."

Lydia showed a disposition to giggle, but Phrosia's frown induced instead a slight fit of coughing.

"You came home for a week," accused Phrosia, "and now as soon as you learn that she is coming you begin to talk about going back to the city Monday."

"At least," I answered, gently, "I shall stay until the Christmas presents are given out."

Phrosia gave a well-bred but distinct snort of contempt.

"If that's all you came for, you might as well have your presents now, instead of waiting until to-morrow; then you can take the six o'clock train."

I looked hurt.

"My dear Phro," I murmured, "am

I one to deprive you and Lydia of pleasure? Think you I would knowingly reduce by one iota the unhallowed joy you find in secreting my gifts in out-of-the-way places on Christmas morning, and leading me to tramp wearily from one end of the house to the other in search of them? Heaven forbid! And besides, there are certain velvet-clad boxes I wot of, which possess the magic property of causing their contents to disappear utterly if opened save on Christmas Day."

Phrosia's frowns lessened, and Lydia sighed wistfully.

"Why can't you be nice, Tom?" asked Phrosia, insinuatingly.

"Yes, please do behave," echoed Lydia.

"From this moment I reform," I declared. "What are your wishes?"

"Well," answered Phrosia, visibly brightening, "first, you are to stay here a week."

"It is done."

"Then you are to be nice—just as you can be, Tom, when you want to——" (I acknowledged the flattery with a deep obeisance)—"to Marcelle."

"I obey."

"And—you are not to mention the princess once."

"Oh, I say! Not even one little teeny weeny once?"

"Not once!" answered Phrosia, decisively. I pondered.

"Maybe Miss Varick would like to hear the story," I suggested.

"She has heard the story, and she doesn't——"

"And Ananias spake unto his wife, Sapphira, saying——"

"Well, that's all I told her," cried Phrosia. She had the grace to blush. "She doesn't know anything else, not a single thing! Not even how old you are!" There was malice in that. Phrosia has an idea that I am ashamed of being thirty-six—or, maybe—eight.

"Phro," I said, accusingly, "it is idle to dissemble. You have told her all!" I paid no heed to her frenzied explanations. I was merciless. "You have invited her down here in the desperate hope that I will fall in love with her, and marry her. She will be the sixth."

"Fourth!" cried Phrosia.

"I say sixth; I refuse to believe you innocent in the matter of the Criterion and the girl from Baltimore. But let me tell you now that you are doomed to failure. I will treat Miss Varick with all kindness; I will even, at times, make decorous love to her; I will even refrain from speaking of the princess; but, *but* I will not propose to her! I am adamant—I mean adamant!"

"I think you're the—the——!"

"One moment," I commanded, sternly. "Lydia, leave the room; your innocent young ears must not be shocked."

Lydia giggled, and kept her seat. Phrosia, with a gesture of despair, swept regally from the dining-room. I went to the window. The world was white under foot and leaden-gray above. We were to have a white Christmas; of that there was no doubt. It had snowed on and off for two days, and the flakes were still falling in a desultory, half-hearted way, as if wondering what was the use when the ground was already covered to a good six inches. The shrubbery on the terrace was roofed with white; the trees beyond were giant white plumes. A quarter of a mile away the woods were dimly visible, gray and alluring. I turned to Lydia.

"Who is going for Miss Varick?" I asked.

"Phro said she would send Peter."

I was secretly relieved.

"I hope he will be sober," I said.

"Oh, I don't think Peter drinks, Tom," cried Phrosia, distressedly.

I kissed her.

"My dear sister, you are too charitable. If Peter wasn't half seas over when he brought me up yesterday I'll—I'll propose to Miss Varick! However, it is probable that he has recovered before this. Well, I shan't be wanted until dinner time, eh? So I'm going out into the world to enjoy my last few hours of freedom. And lest that freedom should be disputed by a rabbit or a hawk I shall take a shotgun along."

"It looks horribly cold and mushy out," said Lydia, with a little shiver.

"My dear, my thoughts will keep me warm. Do you know whom I am going to think about, Lydia?"

She made a face.

"Of the princess, I suppose."

I waved an imaginary glass.

"Of the princess, God bless her!"

A quarter of an hour later I was trudging across the cornfield, the little flakes nestling against my face, and the pure, sweet air, redolent of the snow and the pine forests, producing a veritable intoxication. I desire to emphasize that. The plea of intoxication may influence the reader to view my subsequent conduct more leniently. I trust so.

In one pocket of my leather shooting jacket were a dozen shells, and under one arm was my shotgun. This I took more for comfort and companionship than with any expectation of using it. Given a pipe and a gun, a man need never feel lonesome. At least, so I thought then. As I went, puffing leisurely at my briar, into whose bowl the flakes fell with tiny hisses, and stumbling now and then over the drift-hidden stubble, my thoughts went back to the recent passage of arms with Phrosia. Certainly she had grounds for complaint. I owned that. For five years she had used every art and effort to marry me off, and without success. It was no wonder that she gave way at times to disgust and discouragement. The surprising thing was that she should have the courage to persist. Her devotion really touched me, and there were moments when I was almost prepared to proceed of my own free will, and place my head with what

grace I might upon the block of matrimony. At such moments Memory, that deft artist, with a single sweep of her brush, conjured up before me a picture that turned me from my rash purpose. And the picture Memory drew was a portrait of the princess.

The princess!

As ever when I thought of her, my heart raced for an instant like a propeller out of water, and then settled back to its normal gait, but all aglow with a little warmth half pleasurable and half of pain. It may seem strange that a man of thirty-eight, normally, disgustingly sane, should experience the sensations of a schoolboy stealing his first kiss at thought of a woman seen but once in his life. And yet that was the case with me, Thomas H. Ledyard, M. S., naval architect. I had found the one woman in the world for me a little over four years previous, only to lose sight of her ere I could so much as learn her name.

It was on the channel steamer from Calais to Dover. I have only to close my eyes now to see the dark, wind-driven clouds racing overhead, and the leaden-green waves tumbling and snarling alongside; to see the plunge and toss of the uncomfortable little tub of a steamer; to see a girl of eighteen or nineteen, wrapped in a long, gray ulster, and capped with a fluffy white tam-o'shanter, with brown hair blown by the wind, an oval face at once delicate and strong, a nose modeled upon that of a Grecian goddess, cheeks rosy with the sea wind's kisses, and eyes gray and soft as a dove's wing. Ah, those eyes! In all the world there were none like them. They were fearless and tender, grave and laughing, proud and appealing; eyes that said no and promised yes; that would have made a saint turn sinner, and a sinner become saint, and that changed that tempestuous crossing into a sail on a summer sea for me. She was with a man of about fifty—her father beyond a doubt—and all the way across she never left his side, but strove to make him forget his sickness with cheerful words and tender ministering. I watched, unobtrusively I hope, and

prayed devoutly that the man's illness would send him groping from the deck, and leave her for a moment alone. But fortune was against me, and all the reward I gained was the knowledge that she returned the interest I displayed. It was no vulgar flirtation; a calm glance now and then, a look of good comradeship, the silent countersign of one American to another; for that they were Americans was quite apparent. How many pipes I smoked there on that windy deck, with the tobacco blowing out in sparks almost as fast as I could put it in, I do not know. I was a man in a dream. Had the boat gone down beneath me I would have had no regrets so that the same sea held us both. It was madness, if you like, but an hour of such madness is worth a life of sanity.

At Dover, I told myself, I would not lose sight of them; I would follow them to London, to Liverpool, to Scotland, to Wales, back home, to the end of the earth! Only, I must meet her and know her. And then, at the landing, a clumsy porter tripped me with a giant portmanteau, and sent me sprawling with a broken ankle. Instead of sitting near her in the train, I was put into a second-class compartment where there was plenty of room for my wounded limb. At London I made inquiries at the steamship offices, at the railway stations, at the hotels. I followed up numerous clues, all false. At the end of a fortnight I came home. For a year afterward I never passed a woman, was she young and slender, that I did not turn for a look into her face. Every corner was a glorious possibility; I chased a gray ulster in a hansom from my club to Forty-second Street on one occasion, only to be rewarded with yellow hair and eyes that, brown and welcoming as they were, were not the eyes I sought. After a while the first ceaseless ache wore off, and I made a confidante of Phrosia. I called my unknown the princess, for want of a title better fitting her charms and the dear, proud tilt of her little head. Phrosia teased, and eventually I pretended to make fun of my romance in self-defense. But the old longing never died out of my

heart, and that winter's day as I crossed the cornfield it was stronger than ever. I told myself that this was because of the season, for when one is nearing forty, Christmas is a day not all of merriment; a day when old hopes come creeping in out of the storm to huddle a while beside you at the fire.

I walked far, skirting the forest for a while, and then plunging into its silent, untrodden depths, busy with my thoughts, and paying so little heed to anything else that a fox, lean and gaunt from long fasting, stood in a clearing and watched me until I was almost upon him. Later I saw two rabbits in a swamp that was all feathery bushes and snow-laden willows, but missed them both, just as I knew I should, and was glad the next moment. It began to grow dark, and I made the discovery that the snow had increased, and the wind as well. I turned and tried to retrace my steps, but the world, save for a little space about me, was blotted out in the swirling storm, and I shrugged my shoulders, huddled my chin into my collar, and philosophically accepted the fact that I had lost my way. The little compass on my chain gave me my bearings, and I filled my pipe again, lighted it under the leaf of a wax myrtle bush, and trudged homeward. Perhaps half an hour later, with the storm grown to very respectable severity, I found a road. Nothing had been along it recently and the going was hard, so that I made small progress. There was still light enough to show the fences and bushes that lined the way, but that was all.

Suddenly out of the grayness behind there came sounds of bells, a hoarse voice raised high, and the soft thud of hoofs in the snow. I sprang to the side of the road. Something formless, black and huge shot into vision and passed me, but not before I had made out two plunging horses, a swaying *carriole*, and a fur-capped form standing upright, shouting and plying the whip. Then it was gone in the storm, and I was bending over a dark form huddled in the drift beside the fence. The form was that of a woman. Before I could

ask the question that sprang anxiously to my lips she spoke.

"Will you help me up, please?" The voice was a trifle breathless, but quite calm. Wonderingly and silently I obeyed, and she strove to shake the clinging snow from her dark skirt, and the high-collared fur jacket.

"You're not hurt, I hope?" I asked.

"Not a bit, thank you. I jumped."

The voice was very sweet, and I felt a stirring at the heart. She led the way into the road, and raised the veil that had hidden her face. Then she looked about her into the swirling mists.

"Can you tell me where I am?" she asked.

I didn't answer, and she turned her eyes toward me with dawning surprise, and I looked into them, and they were gray eyes; eyes fearless and tender, grave and laughing, proud and appealing; eyes that said no and promised yes; that would have made a saint turn sinner, and a sinner become saint, and that changed that storm-swept country road into a corner of Paradise for me. I had found my princess!

What would you have done there? Laughed or cried? Truly, I could have done either or both with all the heart that was bounding, and racing, and tumbling over, and standing still all on the instant beneath my coat. But I only looked a moment longer through the falling flakes into those gray depths, and said, almost calmly:

"On the Crestfield Road."

And, as I said it, I thought I saw a gleam of recognition in her face, yet could not be sure, for she pulled down the veil again quickly, and turned away.

"And can you tell me if I am very far from the Ledyards' place, The Larches?"

"Unfortunately, I can't," I answered. "Were you going?" Then it flashed

across me that the princess was none other than Phrosia's guest. "Then you're Miss Varick?" I cried.

"Yes, and you? Are you Mr. Ledyard?"

"Yes; Phrosia's brother."

She looked a moment, and then put out her hand with a soft, low laugh. I

took it, and the cherubim sang. She must have wondered at the warmth of that handclasp. Had she not drawn her own gloved hand away I believe I should have been holding it yet.

"Shall we go on?" she asked, demurely.

"On? Oh, yes, by all means! I can't tell you how glad I am—that is, how sorry I am that this should have happened. I suppose it was Peter?"

"I don't know his name," she answered. "It may have been Peter. I only know he was dreadfully intoxicated, and that we almost upset time and again. I made up my mind that as soon as I saw any one on the road or came close to a house I would jump. And I did," she added, simply.

"The idiot! The drunken fool!" I said aloud.

"Glorious, Heaven-sent Jehu!" I thought. "His Christmas shall be made memorable."

"Did you say you didn't know how far from home we were?" she asked, struggling for breath in the wind.

"I'm sorry to say I don't." I explained how I came to lose my way. "However," I added, "I don't believe we are more than two miles away."

"Two miles!" she cried. "How awful!"

I could have chosen an adjective more fit.

"If you will take my arm," I suggested, "I think you will find it easier traveling." She took it, and I wondered if she could feel the happy thumping of my heart. We trudged for a while in silence, the snow blinding our eyes and the wind whisking our garments and biting at face and hands; talking was well-nigh out of the question. Presently she stopped, turned her back to the storm, and, steadying herself against the arm I put forth, gasped for breath.

"I fear I shall never be able to walk two miles if it stays like this," she said. "I'm very sorry, really."

"There is no need to walk two miles," I answered. "I was just going to tell you that——"

I paused, assailed by temptation.

Across the road, dim and spectral in the grayness, stood a signpost. I recognized that post. I knew where we were. But temptation whispered in my ear, and I yielded without a struggle.

"That there is a cabin a little beyond here," I continued, "belonging to a man who occasionally does work for us; Fisher is his name. It isn't far, and we are sure to find a fire there; you can get dry and warm, and as soon as the storm lets up a bit I'll send Fisher for a sleigh."

"Oh, a real fire!" she sighed.

"Look here, Miss Varick," I said, "I wish you'd let me carry you. It's inhuman to make you walk through this——"

"Oh, but it's only a little way, you said; and besides, I'm rested now. Come, please; and remember that fire!"

A hundred yards farther along I looked for the light of Fisher's window, but in vain. After some search I found the gate, and we staggered through the drifts, only to discover the cabin, a black hulk in the gathering gloom, silent and deserted with locked door. I swore under my breath. The princess sank on the snow-covered log that did duty as a step.

"Mr. Fisher's welcome isn't exactly—fervent, is it?" she asked, with a little catch in her voice.

I stopped fumbling with the window shutter, and strode to her side.

"If you cry," I said, hoarsely, "I'll——" I turned, and went back to the shutter, repentant and miserable.

"I'm not crying," she said; and she laughed a little to prove it. Then I got my fingers inside the boards, laid back with all my weight, and went tumbling into the snow. After that it was simple. The princess got through the window on the second attempt, and in two minutes I had a fire roaring in Fisher's little stove, and the princess had taken off her jacket and boots and hat and veil, and was standing there before me in the light of a kerosene bracket lamp, the flames themselves no brighter than her eyes. I drew a stool to the stove, and made her hold her little stockinged feet to the warmth. Then I threw aside my

coat and surveyed the situation. There was no Fisher. I strove to disguise my joy in the discovery. In the pantry—formed of a shoe box nailed to the side of the cabin—was bread, coffee, butter, bacon and sugar, besides tins containing baking powder, flour, salt, mustard and several things unknown to me. I announced my discovery, and the princess hurried to my side.

"How beautiful!" she said, in an awed whisper. She looked as though we had happened upon an eight course dinner or a bag of diamonds; her eyes were large and radiant.

"There's only bacon," I said, taking my gaze from her face as a matter of safety.

"Only bacon! Only bacon! Thankless man, what do you ask?"

"Nothing more in the wide world," I answered, devoutly. She dropped her eyes.

"Shall we have to stay very long?" she asked, soberly.

"I hope—not," I replied. "I think the storm will hold up shortly. If it doesn't I'll—er—see what can be done. Meanwhile, as it's nearly six o'clock, suppose we have dinner? It's not a fashionable hour, I know, but—"

"Oh, never mind about fashions! I'm famished. Where are the pans?"

We found them, and she commanded me to sit down at the stove and smoke. I didn't smoke, but I sat at the stove, and watched her, my soul at peace and my heart singing peans. She pinned a towel—I think it was the only one the cabin boasted—over her gown, and moved about quickly and deftly between shelves and table and stove. Twenty minutes later we were at opposite sides of the clean pine board, the smoking, crackling bacon and crazily-sliced bread between us. Our coffee was guiltless of milky dilution, but to one of us at least it was double-distilled nectar. We laughed at the makeshift napkin which we shared between us, at the rude, chipped plates and clumsy, horn-handled knives. We forgot the storm that growled without and eddied into the cabin through the shutterless window, and we ate hungrily with appetites

sharpened by the novelty of the feast. And when we had finished, and had cleared away the dishes, we drew up to the roaring stove, and for the first time constraint came between us.

"Please smoke," she commanded. I filled my pipe, and obeyed. Then silence fell again. It would have taken me a whole day to say what I wanted to, and yet my lips seemed incapable of forming a sound. I glanced up, and found her eyes upon me. They darted away swiftly, but my tongue was loosened.

"It was four years ago in October," said I.

I saw the color flood her cheeks. She watched the fire.

"Four years ago," I repeated, thoughtfully. I waited. She stole a glance, and then dropped her eyes, and I knew that she remembered.

"Four years is a long time," I said.

"Is it?" she asked, uninterestedly.

"It has been to me."

"I think the storm is passing," she suggested.

"I hope your father recovered from his sickness."

"He is quite well, thank you."

"Did you stop long in London?"

"When?"

"Four years ago."

She creased the white forehead under the waving brown hair. "About a fortnight—I think."

"At a private house, I suppose?"

"At the Hotel Cecil."

"The Cecil?" I cried. "But, surely —! They assured me you were not there!"

"They were mistaken, you see." Then: "Don't you think you were rather—impolite, shall I say?—to make inquiries?"

"Not a bit; one can't learn without asking questions."

"And you didn't learn even then, it seems."

"No; British hotel-keepers are notably idiotic," I replied, disgustedly. "You didn't go about much, did you?"

"You mean—four years ago?" she asked, with a ghost of a smile.

"Four years ago," I answered, gravely.

"No, I was taken ill the day after we reached London, and we came home by the first steamer after I was well enough."

"You were ill for two weeks?" I cried. "And I never knew!" I couldn't credit it.

"Was it necessary that you should know?" she asked, with a delicious lifting of the eyebrows.

I passed the question as quite irrelevant.

"Will you tell me where you live?"

"At the Hotel Bermond."

"But I've passed there a thousand times!" I cried. "I never saw you!"

"Because you weren't looking. I saw you—twice."

"Oh!" I groaned. "And you didn't speak!"

She laughed enjoyably.

"You're absolutely ridiculous, Mr. Ledyard!"

"Am I? But you might have spoken."

"But I didn't know you; why should I have spoken?"

"I knew you enough for both of us," I answered. "And if you had spoken you'd have saved time. When did you see me first?"

"About three months after we returned. I was on the steps as you went up the avenue."

"Oh, why didn't you shout?" I groaned. "We've wasted four years."

She laughed again, softly.

"But I didn't know your name."

"That's no excuse," I said, reproachfully. "I'd have answered to anything; Tom, Dick or Harry. You need only have called 'Hi!' and I'd have heard you blocks away. Don't you understand that I've been waiting four years and more to hear your voice; four years to see your face?"

She dropped her gaze, the color stealing again into the soft cheeks.

"Is this kind?" she asked, gravely. "Wouldn't it be nicer to wait until—until I'm less at your mercy?"

"Men aren't kind or nice when they've been waiting four years," I answered,

pitilessly. "They're absolutely brutal and mean. Are you afraid?"

"A little, I think," she replied.

"Please, please don't!"

"I won't if you'll tell me one thing."

"Perhaps."

"Did you know before you came up here to visit Phrosia that you would find me here?"

"Yes," she answered, readily.

"Ah, but I don't mean Phro's brother, but the man you had seen on the Dover boat."

"I—you are asking a great many questions, Mr. Ledyard."

"My name's Tom."

"Is it?"

"Yes; do you like Tom as a name?"

"I've never considered the matter."

"Please consider it, and let me know to-morrow. I wish you'd try to like it. I like Marcelle very much; in fact, I think it's a beautiful name; the Princess Marcelle," I murmured. The Princess Marcelle blushed; or was it only the firelight on her face? "And now, to return to my question, please."

"I don't think I shall answer any more questions to-night."

"Then I shall say things you won't like, perhaps."

"But you promised!" she cried.

"On one condition; a condition still unfulfilled."

"Well—yes, I did know you were—you, then," she replied, defiantly. "Are you satisfied?"

"Ineffably!"

"You are very silly!"

"I am very happy; with me the two go together. Are you silly when you're happy?"

"No."

"Then you are happy now?"

"Not a particle."

"Then I must do something to make you so. What shall it be? Shall I sing? I only know one song; it's called 'The Night That Larry Was Shot.' Would you care to hear it?"

"Not at all," she laughed. "The only thing you could do to make me happy would be to get me to The Larches."

"It shall be done!"

"Well, when?"

"At once!" But I made no move.
"Princess——"

"That's not my name."

"Marcelle——"

"Nor that."

"Yet?" I insinuated.

"Do you think you're kind?" she asked, with a little tremble of the lips.

I was all contrition.

"I'm a brute!" I cried. "Please forgive me; you will, won't you? But—oh, my dear, if you only knew how I've hungered for you all this time! You'd understand then, and you'd be very, very sorry for me."

She had risen from her chair, and was facing me accusingly.

"You forget your promises very soon," she said, coldly.

"I'm afraid I do," I answered, humbly. "Will you forgive me? I—I'll try to be miserably good."

"I'll forgive you on one condition," she said, sternly.

"Any!" I said.

"That you'll give me your word—and keep it, sir—never to say—to speak as you've been speaking again."

"Never!" I cried. "I'll be—I'll be shot if I promise any such impossible thing! But I'll agree not to offend again until—let me see—until to-morrow morning."

"For a month!" she said, inexorably.

"We'll compromise," I suggested. "Until to-morrow evening. Just think, please; to-morrow is Christmas, and you're my Christmas present, such a present as good Saint Nicholas never before brought to any one in all the world. What's the use in having a present you can't talk to?"

"I think the snow has stopped," she said.

I knew it had, for I could see the window from my seat.

"Idiotic snow!" I muttered.

"Why the stars are out!" cried the princess, from the casement.

"Idiotic stars, too," I sighed.

She faced me accusingly.

"How long have they been out?" she demanded.

"Not over fifteen minutes! I swear it!"

"Then we could have been home by this time?"

"Well, of course—if you look at it in that way——"

"It's quite evident you're not to be trusted," she said, severely. She turned away, and drew her boots from under the stove. I wondered if she was very much offended. If she was what would she be later, when she discovered the worst? I placed a stool under the window, and found my coat and cap and gun. Then I took her jacket and waited. She arose with a stamp of her feet, and turned about.

"My jacket?" she asked.

"It's here."

"Oh!" She slipped her arms into it, and I thought I caught a suggestion of a smile as I turned the high collar up about her neck, and took courage. Going to the stove, I abstracted a glowing brand, and with the charred end wrote across the top of the white pine table:

"The Princess Marcelle and Tom Ledyard have supped."

At the window I paused and looked about. I had put out the lamp, and only the flickering firelight remained.

"It is a very beautiful place," I sighed. There was no reply from the princess, and I climbed out into the snow. She followed dexterously. Overhead was a clear expanse of winter sky, star-gemmed and glorious. Before us the world lay white and gleaming, immaculate in its Christmas robes. The wind had gone, and the air was still and nipping. Across the road, black against the snow, stood the great stone columns of a gate, and beyond at a little distance there shone——

"Look!" cried the princess, "there must be a house up there where all those lights are?"

"Yes, that—that is a house," I acknowledged, as I led the way through the drifts.

"But—why, we could have gone there instead—instead——!"

I heard the princess give a gasp, and I turned with sinking heart to face the cold.

"Is that The Larches?" she demanded.

"Yes," I answered.

"And did you know——?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Oh!" said the princess.

I watched her face anxiously. Perhaps my expression of guilt and abject remorse saved me. Her mouth quivered.

"It was four years," I said, pleadingly.

Then her smile spread and broke into laughter, silvery, delicious. I became valorous again. I joined my mirth with hers, and we laughed together out there in the new snow under the clear, twinkling stars until she gasped for breath.

"Don't!" she begged. "Oh, it's too ridiculous!"

"It is," I agreed.

"You're simply absurd."

"I am," I said. I'd have agreed to anything.

"And it was very, very wrong of you."

"It was," I concurred, cheerfully.

"And you don't care," she said, with a suggestion of grievance.

"I will if you want me to," I answered, eagerly.

"Oh, you're quite hopeless," she sighed, with a gesture of despair. "Please take me home."

We went on. We came to a fence. There was no gate.

"But I don't remember this," demurred the princess.

"It is a shorter cut," I replied. "See, our own gate is in front of us. And this fence is very low."

"It looks very high," said the princess, with suspicion.

I vaulted it to prove my assertion, and held out my hand. After an instant of hesitation she put one of her own into it, and climbed to the first rail, then to the second, then to the third. Then I took both her hands.

"Now jump," I said. She obeyed, and came down gently into the snow and my arms. I found myself looking fathoms deep into her starlit eyes; eyes fearless and tender, grave and laughing, proud and appealing; eyes that said no and promised yes; that would have made a saint turn sinner, and a sinner become saint, and that changed the whole world for me.

The color fled from her cheeks, leaving them pallid in the wan glow of the stars. From somewhere afar off, across the snowy world, floated the faint tinkling of sleigh bells. I bent my head. I heard a little sigh go trembling off on the still air. Her lids fluttered down, hiding those dear gray eyes, and my lips sought her lips and found them, warm and tender.

It had been four years.

And in a moment I was standing away from her; her hands in mine, glad and remorseful, triumphant and penitent.

"Dear! Dear!" I whispered, "forgive me!"

She raised her face, but her eyes were still hidden.

"I—I suppose I shall have to," she said, tremulously, "because—I think—I meant you to!"

"Princess!"

"You see," she whispered, softly, "it—was four years!"



DISAPPOINTMENT

LIKE the slow gnawing of a deadly tooth,
It saps old age and harrows eager youth,—
Maims honest effort,—goads the heart that grieves,
And ströws the soul with Life's autumnal leaves.

WILLIAM HAMILTON HAYNE.

CHRISTMAS, 1903

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

BEYOND the century's mark of nineteen hundred
Time's feet have pressed, since first Christ spake the word.
Down all those years God's mighty truths have thundered;
Yet now behold the people who have heard!
Where seek the love, on which His creed was founded?
Not in the chaos of these street alarms,
Not where the strife of war has always sounded,
Not where Progression means death-dealing arms!

My soul beheld a vision of the Master:—
Methought He stood with grieved and questioning eyes,
Where Freedom drove its chariot to disaster
And toilers heard, unheeding, toilers' cries.
Where man withheld God's bounties from his neighbor,
And fertile fields were sterilized by greed.
Where Labor's hand was lifted against labor,
And suffering serfs to despots turned when freed.

Majestic rose tall steeple after steeple;
Imperious bells called worshipers to prayer;
But as they passed, the faces of the people
Were marred by envy, anger and despair.
"Christ the Redcemer of the world has risen,
Peace and good will," so rang the major strain.
But forth from sweatshop, tenement and prison,
Wailed minor protests, redolent with pain.

Methought about the Master, all unseeing,
Fought desperate hosts of striking clan, with clan,
Their primal purpose, meant for labor's freeing,
Sunk in vindictive hate of man for man.
Pretentious Wealth, in unearned robes of beauty,
Flung Want a pittance from her bulging purse.
While ill-paid Toil went on dull rounds of duty,
Hell in her heart, and on her lips a curse.

Then spoke the Christ (so wondrous was my vision)
(Deep, deep, His voice, with sorrow's cadence fraught):
"This world to-day would be a realm elysian,
Had my disciples lived the love I taught.
Un-Christlike is the Christian creed men fashion,
Who kneel to worship, and who rise to slay.
Profane pretenders of my holy Passion,
Ye nail Me newly to the cross each day."

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MRS. FITZJOHN'S ENEMY

By Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler

Author of "Place and Power"

IT is strange that some people should be born to the lot of martyrdom, but so it appears to be.

Certain persons—through no fault of their own—are placed in an environment entirely repugnant to all the natural qualities with which they are endowed, and so life becomes to them one prolonged torture.

Such is my own case. Endued with an innate refinement, which is an inherent part of my very being, I have always lived among persons of dull perceptions and common, not to say coarse, tastes; thus all that they said or did jarred upon me to such an extent that my existence became one long and dreary martyrdom.

It was so with my own relations; it is so with the man I married. Neither they nor he have ever had any idea of how they have daily tortured my whole nervous system by the crudeness of their thoughts and the vulgarity of their conversation. I am like a musical person always condemned to listen to instruments that are out of tune, or like a true artist ever compelled to look upon low caricatures or common prints. No one except myself has any notion of what my sufferings have been. Sometimes I am inclined to curse that refinement of nature and delicacy of perception which set me apart from my fellows to such a marked degree; and then again I repent me, and feel that it is better to be as I am—however miserable—than to be as the people among whom I dwell.

Common, alas! as my surroundings have ever been, I have nevertheless endeavored so to touch them with the light

of my own superior refinement as to transform them, to a certain extent, into something which appears—even if in reality it is not—higher and better than themselves. For instance, my maiden name was *Smith*; but I invariably spelled and pronounced it *Smythe*, so as in some slight degree to mitigate its inherent commonplaceness. In the same way I insisted on my husband's changing his surname before I married him from *Johnson* to *Fitzjohn*, which really means the same thing, and yet it sounds so much more gentlemanlike and poetical. Also, I took to calling him *James* instead of *Jacob* (although he was baptized Jacob), since these likewise are but variations of the same name in different languages. And I have a particular objection to Scriptural names, as they always seem to me to savor of Nonconformity; and, to my mind, there is something very inelegant in Nonconformity, and something very aristocratic about the Church of England. I have tried to explain this to James, but he cannot understand it at all; it is in matters such as this that the difference between my refinement and his vulgarity is shown.

And this is the reason why I always say that poor dear grandpapa was a clergyman, although James in his common way invariably tries to dispute it; so I generally manage to bring it in when he is not listening. I am perfectly aware that poor dear grandpapa did not agree with all the doctrines of the English church, nor was he quite, quite one of themselves—as our dear vicar is, for instance. But this is my idea of keeping the Fifth Commandment; and, besides,

there is a Latin proverb which says one should never speak anything but good of the dead.

I find, too, that to call chapel "church," and dinner "lunch," does so add to the finish and refinement of life, and yet costs nothing. And it is in little things such as these that real good breeding is shown. Yet James would blurt out to all the world, in his rough, uncultured way (if I were not at home to stop him), that we both attended a dissenting chapel in our youth, and that we still dine in the middle of the day. How can one comport oneself in a truly lady-like manner when one has a husband like that always dragging one down to his own level? At least I should rather say trying to drag one down, for nothing will ever induce me to share James' plebeian and underbred habit of invariably speaking the truth.

My parents both died when I was quite a young infant, and poor dear grandpapa brought me up. I cannot remember either papa or mamma; but I feel sure I inherited my good breeding and intense refinement from mamma, whose father was a professional man in one of the most aristocratic suburbs of London. It is from mamma's family, too, that I inherit my long nose and small hands and feet—all sure signs of noble birth; poor dear grandpapa's nose turned up, and he took *tens* in ready-made boots!

My life with grandpapa was one long torture, owing to my superiority to all my surroundings. Both he and grandmamma grated upon me at every turn, they had such hopelessly plebeian ideas and habits. Then I met James, who fell in love with me, and asked me to marry him. His uncle was a member of poor dear grandpapa's church; and it was when James (he was vulgarly called Jacob in those days) was staying with his relatives, that he met me, and became attached to me.

There was then a season of terrible indecision on my part. On the one hand, there could be no doubt that there was no prestige about poor James, and that marriage with him would mean the deathblow of all my dreams of once

more regaining my position in the class to which by birth (through dear mamma) I rightly belonged; but, on the other hand, grandpapa, in his coarse way, had always made it clear to me that his stipend would end with his life, and that his small savings would be sunk in an annuity for grandmamma, so that there would be no provision at all for me after his death, and I should then be compelled either to starve or to get my own living.

Now, to my mind, there is something very degrading in the idea of a woman's making money by working for it; the mere thought of such a thing shocks all my innate culture; so I decided that, of the two evils, it would be the lesser one to marry a well-to-do tenant farmer, than to wound my delicate and sensitive nature by earning my own bread.

Of course in those days I dreamed—ah, how vainly!—that continual contact with a thorough gentlewoman such as myself would tend to elevate poor James' mind and to refine his character; instead of which he had merely laughed at my innumerable little elegancies, and has remained the same uneducated boor that he was when I first married him.

It is now some years since grandpapa died, and grandmamma did not long survive him, so that I have severed all ties with that disgusting little manufacturing town where I was born and bred. I have also entirely separated myself from my only surviving relative, Ebenezer Smith, my first cousin on papa's side. He married a woman still more common than himself, and they have settled in Manchester. I have reason to know that he believes me to be no more, and I trust this belief will continue, as I could not endure to have vulgar relations following me down here, where I have succeeded in making a certain position for myself by attending the weekly sewing party at the vicarage, and by subscribing—in company with half a dozen other ladies—to a box of improving literature from Mudie's. I also make a point of always wearing black silk of an evening, with one white camellia in my hair,

and I have had dear mamma's fine collection of cairngorms reset in the latest fashion. How true it is that one can always tell a real lady by her dress!

And now for the incident which formed the one bright spot—the one oasis, so to speak—in the otherwise commonplace and uninteresting desert of my married life.

I was sitting alone at my fancywork one afternoon, as I always make a point of doing whatever household duties may be done, or left undone. I think there is something so essentially refined in doing fancywork after lunch; it gives visitors the impression of such perfect gentleness. I remember on that particular afternoon I was engaged in spreading maidenhair ferns out on a piece of white linen, and then sprinkling the intervening spaces with ink spotted from an old toothbrush. It was a most artistic effort, and is before me as I write, in the shape of a sliding banner-screen with a border of green fringe.

Well, I was absorbed in my work, having always been distinguished by great taste in the arranging of ferns and flowers, when suddenly our parlor maid (I always call her a parlor maid, although she is the only servant we keep; but James, I regret to say, coarsely refers to her as "the slavey") took me by surprise by flinging open the drawing-room door and announcing *Lord Courtprobate*!

Any one could have knocked me down with a feather. For although my antecedents were all so very superior, I had, strange to say, never yet exchanged words with a person of title.

But his lordship put me at my ease at once, with that courtly graciousness which is ever distinctive of the upper classes when they are conversing with their equals.

"I must beg you, madam, to pardon this intrusion," he began, "and to permit me to explain my reasons for inflicting upon you a call from one who has not yet had the pleasure of being introduced to you."

"Granted," I at once replied; "pray, your lordship, be seated."

"Not while you stand," he returned,

with the most beautiful bow I have ever witnessed.

"I believe I have the honor of addressing Mrs. Fitzjohn," he continued, after we had each taken a seat; which was, however, not a rapid process, as I was so flabbergasted at this unexpected event that I sat too much on the edge of my chair, so that it overbalanced, and I should have fallen had not his lordship promptly flown to my rescue, supporting me with the utmost grace while he restored my chair to its rightful position.

"That is my name," I replied; "wife of Mr. James Fitzjohn, of Oakleigh Farm."

Lord Courtprobate bowed even more exquisitely than before. "So I have been led to believe, madam; hence my presence here uninvited."

By this time I had so far recovered myself as to be able to take in the details of my noble guest's appearance. He was middle-aged—in the case of a less exalted personage one would almost have said elderly—with the most dignified and gentlemanlike carriage and manners that I have ever come across. He seemed a very personification of Burke's "Peerage and Landed Gentry," and all the ideas which the mere titles of those distinguished volumes suggest to one's imagination.

"But before we begin our little chat," I interrupted, "will not your lordship take something? Say a glass of sherry wine and a biscuit."

"Alas! that I am compelled to decline your most kind hospitality. But gout, my dear madam, gout is an enemy that has to be humored."

I thought it so nice and friendly of Lord Courtprobate thus to take me into his confidence with regard to his (evidently hereditary) delicacy. It showed that he instinctively recognized that I was the sort of woman with whom he was accustomed to make friends. Yet James never perceives that I belong to a class higher than his own! I suppose that on the principle of "set a thief to catch a thief," it requires a real gentleman to recognize a real lady when he meets her.

"I grieve," I said, "to learn that your lordship is a sufferer from so distressing a complaint as gout. But members of old families, as I know by experience, are liable to these hereditary diseases. It is the price we have to pay for blue blood. In my case, however, it is not gout, but bilious headaches that are the curse of our family; I have heard that my poor dear mamma was a perfect martyr to them."

His lordship smiled most agreeably. "In my case, madam, I fear it is old port rather than old blood that has done the mischief. But to return to the reason for my intrusion upon your privacy; I heard that your maiden name was Smith."

"Pardon, my name before my marriage was Smythe."

"Indeed. I was told that you were a granddaughter of the late Elnathan Smith, pastor of the Congregational Chapel at Mudford."

I was extremely annoyed. Who had dared thus to rake up my past history, and retail it to this delightful and aristocratic old gentleman? It was too bad! How sadly prone evil-minded persons are to bear false witness against their neighbors; or if not actually false, nevertheless that which would have been much better omitted!

"My poor dear grandpapa was a clergyman," I said, somewhat stiffly. But in the midst of my mortification I was filled with thankfulness that James was not present; there is no knowing what he might have said.

"Indeed. Then I fear I have made a mistake, for which you must blame my informant rather than myself. I was told that the late Elnathan Smith has only two descendants now living—a grandson, Ebenezer, residing in Manchester, and yourself."

"I am afraid I cannot give you any information regarding such persons," I said; "for I make it a rule not to mix myself up with Dissenters and people of that kind; they always grate upon my somewhat fastidious taste."

"Then I can only renew my apologies for troubling you at all," replied his lordship, rising from his seat, "and

assure you that I did so under a misapprehension."

"Trouble is a pleasure in this case," said I, with the utmost suavity; "pray do not mention it; but make yourself at home, I beg of you, and let us continue our most agreeable little chat. It is quite a treat for me to meet with any one who moves in high circles, as I am literally buried alive here. With the exception of our dear vicar's family, and the curate and his wife, there is no society worth mentioning."

And then Lord Courtprobate sat down again, and we had a most charming conversation about the giddy throng among which he moved when in London. He had been, it appeared, a lawyer in his younger days, so we got on capitally together as soon as he found out that my maternal grandpapa had also been a professional man. It was the shortest afternoon I ever spent. Alas! what a martyrdom for a woman fitted for such society as that of Lord Courtprobate, to be compelled to pass her days in the uncongenial society of an uneducated person like James!

"I was born near the manufacturing town of Mudford," his lordship happened to mention in the course of conversation. "Do you know it at all, Mrs. Fitzjohn?"

"I once visited it in my maiden days," I guardedly replied. He evidently belonged to the gentry of the surrounding neighborhood, and I would not for worlds have let him know that I had ever had any connection with Mudford Chapel.

"Then you may have come across Mr. Smith, the minister of the chapel there some years ago," his lordship went on, to my surprise. I had no idea that persons of his quality knew anything about Nonconformity.

"I remember hearing his name," I replied, even more guardedly than before.

"He was a wonderful preacher—a most wonderful preacher; and I think the kindest-hearted, most generous man I ever met or hope to meet!"

"Indeed," I replied, somewhat coldly; since, for my part, I had never quite forgiven grandpapa for sinking his sav-

ings in grandmamma's annuity, and so compelling me to couple my lot with the plebeian one of James. Nevertheless, I could not but feel that it was highly condescending of my visitor to refer to him in this way.

"Yes," Lord Courtprobate continued, "he was a most generous man; and certainly gave far more out of his comparative penury than do most men out of their overflowing abundance. No one ever appealed to him for help in vain. And I hear that he took his youngest son's orphan child and brought her up as his own, sparing no pains or money on her education, although he had to deny himself to do this; while her mother's father—a well-to-do person, a chiropodist by profession—declined to have anything to do with the girl, or to contribute in any way toward her maintenance."

How thankful I was that I had so carefully concealed my identity! What would my distinguished visitor have thought of me if he had known that I was the unfortunate orphan who had thus been basely maligned to him? Again I offered up a silent though heartfelt thanksgiving that James was not present. But all that I said aloud was:

"It is most generous of your lordship to speak in such kind terms of an individual so humble as the Rev. Smith, of Mudford. As for me, I pride myself upon holding no communication with Dissenters. Perhaps your lordship is not aware that my husband is vicar's churchwarden in this parish; and I consider that 'public men and their wives cannot be too careful in avoiding everything which might lay them open to misconception.'"

Lord Courtprobate's eye obviously twinkled, and I perceived that with difficulty he restrained a laugh; though I confess I could not see that I had said anything specially witty or clever. But I was evidently a more brilliant conversationalist than I had supposed; and again I sighed to think how my conversational powers were wasted upon James, who always maintains that I am destitute of any sense of humor. It

evidently requires a cultured gentleman, such as Lord Courtprobate, to appreciate my special sort of humor, which is of a far higher and more subtle type than that which serves to amuse poor James and his friends.

After some more delightful conversation—which I flatter myself was as congenial to my guest as it was to me—Lord Courtprobate departed, leaving me even more dissatisfied with my lot than I had been before I had the pleasure of making his charming acquaintance. Having seen for myself how admirably I was fitted to shine in the highest circles, I found it harder than ever to put up with the coarse garbilities of James.

To my surprise, I never saw my dear friend Lord Courtprobate again. Considering what an impression I had evidently made upon him, I should have naturally expected him to renew the acquaintance. But he did not; which proves that his bodily health must have been too delicate to admit of his indulging in those social pleasures for which his intellectual nature craved.

About two years after our memorable interview, my noble friend died, and, to my great disappointment, his survivors omitted to send me even a funeral card, thus leaving me to learn the sad news from the papers, as any ordinary acquaintance might have done; a piece of inconsiderate carelessness on their part which gave me a shock from which it took my sensitive nature some months to recover.

But there was a still more cruel disappointment to follow.

Not long after my dear friend's decease—before, in fact, I had properly recovered from the shock of his death, James looked up from his paper one morning at breakfast, and said:

"I say, old girl, here's some news that will interest you about that old foggy who called to see you a year or two ago—Lord Courtprobate; I dare say you remember the old cove."

Remember him, indeed! And I had never let a day pass without referring to him and to his friendship for me since last we met! It had been the one

bright spot in an otherwise blighted life.

"Of course I remember him, James," I replied, controlling my voice as well as I could, since James' rough opening of the still recent wound upset me not a little. "He was my dearest friend."

"Well, he doesn't play up to the part, I must say," my husband brutally continued, not seeing that such careless handling of tender and sacred memories was absolute torture to my deeper and more refined feelings. "For he has left two-thirds of his large fortune to your cousin, Ebenezer Smith, and the remainder to charities, as he was a widower with no surviving relations."

"To Ebenezer!" I gasped. Surely James must be going mad!

"Yes; I've just been reading a very interesting article on his will in the papers, and I said to myself as I was reading it: 'This will surprise the wife above a bit!' It appears that when he was quite a lad—he was a self-made man, you know—Elnathan Smith, of Mudford, lent him the money to start in life, though—being only a minister—he couldn't very well afford it; and old Courtprobate (Sam Tanner he was called in those days) was so grateful to your grandfather for this, that he made up his mind to leave most of his fortune to Smith's descendants."

"Good gracious! what a tale!" I cried. And James went on:

"Tanner repaid the money as soon as he could; but by the time that he had made his name and fortune at the bar he had lost sight of the Smiths, of Mudford, altogether. I suppose by that time your grandfather was dead and Ebenezer had moved to Manchester. Besides, Tanner was raised to the peerage as Lord Courtprobate, and had a wife and son to provide for."

"And where are they now, I should like to know?"

"Can't say—they're dead," answered James, with one of his vulgar guffaws. "And so, when he found himself left alone in the world again, Lord Courtprobate set about searching for your grandfather's descendants, so that he could make them his heirs, and thus

show his gratitude to his early benefactor."

"Well, I never!" I gasped. I literally could not say any more.

"But I must say," continued James, "that I think it was too bad of the old chap to leave it all to the Ebenezers, and not to think of you; for you were as much your grandfather's grandchild as ever Ebenezer was; and old Courtprobate had made friends with you into the bargain. But for pure injustice give me a judge, as my father used to say!"

"Lord Courtprobate cared for me for my own sake," I replied, haughtily; "he never knew that I was the granddaughter of the Rev. Smith."

"Then he ought to have known; he ought to have found it out. If he could find out that Ebenezer was old Smith's descendant, he could have found out that you were. And, besides, Ebenezer would have told him, if he'd had any proper feeling."

"Ebenezer does not know that I'm alive," I said; "I have cut myself off so completely from him and all his vulgar circle that I have reason to know that they believe I am no more."

James patted me on the back in that rough way of his that I detest. "Well, never mind, old girl; money isn't everything, and though I can't help wishing that that old rogue had done the fair thing by you, you shall never miss his fortune, nor want for anything as long as I have the health and strength to work for you."

"Of course, money is not everything," I replied, shaking James' heavy hand from off my shoulders; "the fact that I enjoyed Lord Courtprobate's friendship is far more to me than all his money. But what I cannot understand is why he left his money to Ebenezer and his wife, and not to me, when it was I who was his friend. Somebody must have maligned me to him and set him against me; but who could it have been?"

James scratched his head, and looked puzzled. "Exactly; who could it have been?"

"I don't believe it could have been the Ebenezers, because they believe I am dead; and they haven't seen me since I

was a girl, and used to be very fond of me then. No; though they are vulgar people, they are never ill-natured. In fact, I consider their overflowing good-nature toward everybody, as one of the signs of their ill-breeding. The truly refined can always make themselves disagreeable."

"Well, my girl," said James, "whoever has done you this ill turn is the worst enemy you ever had; but good-

ness knows—for I'm blest if I do—who on earth it could have been!"

"As you say, James," I replied, "it is an enemy who has done this thing; and I trust that he or she—whichever it may be—will be rewarded according to his or her deserts. But who it can have been I have not the faintest shadow of an idea."

And I have never been able to find out to this day.



AMBITION

'TIS not of Elsie's eyes I sing,
For they out-glory song;
The praises of her teeth or lips
Not here belong.

The rose that glows upon her hair
To cheer the Sabbath tea,
With mere allusion, tho' sincere,
Content must be.

I sing aloud,—no, low and long—
Nor teeth, nor lips nor eyes,
But twin effulgences petite—
He! Paris ties!

They take me back to Paris streets,
I see old Madeleine,
The bridges where the 'busses grind
O'er silent Seine.

With duplex glow they hold my gaze,
No speck their splendor mars,—
While buckles on the instep arched
Shine out like stars!

I muse on life, my hopes and aims,
And all save one are gone—
The single wish I'd been the clerk
That tried them on!

T. H. SYMES.

MIDWINTER MADNESS

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF THE SOUTH

By Josephine Dixon

Author of "Money and Matrimony," Etc.

I.

MARSE BILLY LANGHORNE was a fit product of his environment.

He was tall and sallow from generations of hot bread, and so thin as to be scarcely distinguishable from his own shadow.

His tastes, though, were large. He believed in big families, big houses and big shoes, and his hospitality was expansive to the boundaries of the earth. His great stone house, built in Lord Fairfax's time, fairly bulged at all its joinings with the host of children and guests that swarmed through it. The food that passed from the kitchen under the covered way to the dining-room would have fed a labor union during a strike. His stables were full of horses, and his pastures of cows. In the back yard, a pickaninny or two roosted in every tree, and ate their heads off at every meal.

And Marse Billy wasn't rich. It's doubtful if Mr. Carnegie would be, if he spent money like Marse Billy. His idea of paying wages was to empty his pockets. His idea of friendship was to sign every man's note; and of hospitality, to indorse for every stranger. He kept no books, but every Christmas he took his wallet out of his pocket and counted its contents. That, he estimated, was the amount he was worth, and the method saved the annoyance of a bank book.

About the time that the wallet grew flabby and its sides fell in, Marse Billy

was appointed judge of the circuit court; and if under his rulings justice did languish a little, forbearance and charity waxed and grew fat, and the statistics even showed a falling off in small crimes in that section.

Now Marse Billy's wife was dead, and Marse Billy's girls, being Langhornes, were the beauties of Virginia. They might just as well have been the beauties of all the States, except that the salary of a circuit judge allows for the bringing out of only one girl at a time, and doesn't provide for a career where the jaundiced journals thrive.

When it came Bess Langhorne's time to attend her first german, all Virginia agreed she was the most beautiful of all the beautiful Langhornes. Her hair was as black and as smooth and as shiny as the coat of her favorite mare, who, by the way, was Conchita, out of Lydia, and winner of hurdles herself. Her skin was of the color and texture of jasmine, except in the cheeks, where it took on azalea tints, with fine veins running faintly blue through her milk-white temples. Her eyes were dark, like her hair, wide at the inner corners and tapering out to a fine thread, and full of the vigor and sunshine of a boy's. Her figure, too, full as it seemed of fine feminine potentialities, had the clean finish of line and curve that one sees in the running boy in the museum at Naples. On a horse, her back swept in a straight line without an inward curve from the saddle to her hair, and in the ballroom one was conscious that under the white, delicately nourished skin there

were muscles of the elasticity and tension of steel springs. And her voice—well, her voice made one think of "Aux Italiens" and Italy, and all things poetical and teary, even when she clucked to her horse or scolded a little darky from an upper gallery. It was soft and throaty and Southern, with suspended cadences and eliminated terminals and unexpected chords that had come straight from African jungles by way of colored mammies and uncles.

It was the year after she "came out" in Aurora, that Marse Billy decided she must have a winter in Washington, and it was during that winter that Sir Arthur Noel Montague, touring the States in search of a moneyed wife, heard her voice, and abandoned the object of his journey. While she remained in Washington he did not leave the capital, and the following autumn, after she returned to Aurora, he suddenly found urgent business in Virginia. It wasn't an easy thing, that finding business around Aurora. The section didn't furnish much business other than raising a little tobacco and talking politics; but with a little diligence Sir Arthur discovered some coal mines about twenty miles from the town, recently opened and full of promise. It didn't take long to decide that it was necessary for him to inspect them.

When Sir Arthur arrived, he presented his compliments to Marse Billy, who opened his house to the Englishman, his portable bath and his various bags. The inspection of the mine waited many days, during which Sir Arthur arose early for long rides with Bess, following her a little anxiously on long-tailed horses with wonderful pacing gaits, and taking barbed fences with his heart in his mouth and his hand on the pommel. In the afternoons, he lounged about in front of open fires, drank endless mint juleps with the judge, and for the first time in his existence, learned what all that fighting between the North and South had been about. On "co't" days, when all the inhabitants of the county, apportioned two or three to a horse, appeared in Aurora, he attended court, and listened to Marse Billy's re-

markable interpretations of justice, the elemental principle of which was that no woman should ever be allowed to lose a suit and no negro to win one. Between cigarettes, it occurred to him occasionally that the mines were yet unvisited, and though he had a singular lack of enthusiasm about them, he made this suggestion one day to several of the sisters:

"If you-all would like to take me-all (isn't that the way they say it down here?) for a drive, and will promise to take good care of me, I might consent to honor those mines with my presence tomorrow."

And the girls had laughingly agreed; that is, all except Bess, who looked up from her sewing to remark, in a soft drawl:

"I'm not sure I shouldn't as soon take a dark lantern and a jimmy and break into a bank as to go down in a mine. It has always seemed to me that men who could make their living in mines were the sort who'd just as soon make them in a penitentiary."

"By men," commented young Nan Langhorne, gayly, "she means Mr. Harding. He owns some mines around here, and we got acquainted with him while Bess was in Washington, and every one of us fell in love with him. But we're well-trained youngsters, and we know we're not expected to think of marrying until we get Bess off; so we wrote this young man up to her, and we told her how beautiful he was to look at, and how rich and how noble; and the way she rewarded our solicitude was by sending back word that if we ever mentioned his name in another letter she'd throw herself away on the first man that proposed to her—"

"Jove, if I'd only been standing in with you at that time," interrupted Sir Arthur.

"It was like this," Nan went on. "Bess had never even seen the man, and after that, she wouldn't. When he called, she was out, and when we had him here to dinner, she went off into the next county for the day. I suppose he thinks she's deformed, or defective, or something, and that we keep her hid from company."

Bess' cheeks were vividly pink, but she laughed with the others.

"You haven't been a girl, and the eldest of a flock like that," she said, waving her sewing out toward the broad hall, where numerous children sprawled, or played, or fought, "and you don't know how it feels to have everybody wondering why on earth you don't get married, and to have every available man looked upon as a possible husband for you. You see, in the South, if you aren't married by twenty-five, you're an old maid, and you've disgraced your family. I'll be twenty-three next birthday, and Nan and the rest of them are so anxious about me that they never see a man without wondering if I won't marry him."

"If I can be of any assistance——" volunteered Sir Arthur, with his hand on his heart; but, catching a very bright and dangerous light in her eyes, he dropped the sentence half finished, laughed, and added a question about the mines.

"You will go, then? We settled all that before, didn't we?"

And early the next day they started.

II.

At the opening of the shaft, the car awaited them, a grimy affair that stood on the surface at a deceptive level, and as it descended took on a precipitous incline that bundled them all in a heap at the lower end. At the bottom of the shaft, the miner who accompanied them furnished them with small oil lamps, that burned dimly and malodorously. The paths were wet under foot, and water dripped from overhead, and the walls were slimy where one touched them, and a rushing stream ran threateningly at either side of the road.

"If I had known," mourned Sir Arthur, from out of the darkness, "I wouldn't have asked you to come along."

And Bess was silent, while her sisters murmured polite enthusiasms. The

miner explained the "stopes" and the "levels" and the "veins," flourishing his light about to illustrate his oration.

A mule, dragging a heavy cart, stumbled upon them, and they were forced out into the running water to make way for it. Bess stopped to pat and encourage the mule, after the fashion she used with Conchita; but the animal, unaccustomed to the sight or sound of woman, repudiated the kindness, and jumped off the track. A moment of confusion followed, during which the others in the party moved on, unaware that she had stopped behind. The man guiding the cart offered humble apologies for his own and the mule's existence.

"He's a little weak-minded in his head, anyway," he declared. "He wanted to chew up the last party that went through here. Even the boss don't care to come down in white folks' clothes. Seems as if he knows just who ought to be here and who oughtn't."

"I shouldn't call him weak-minded, then," she remarked.

"Oh, laws, miss, he don't mind that. Nothin' ain't nothin' to him, short of——"

He turned around, and flashed his light along the tunnel.

"Your people's gettin' on a piece," he said. "They's turned in at the first opening yonder. Shall I go back with you to find 'em?"

"No; oh, no," she answered, hastily moving in the direction indicated. "The first opening, you said? That's all right; they can't have gone but a step or two."

The man chirruped to the mule, and the cart rattled noisily along the track. The girl ran uneasily to the opening of the first black cavern, and entered it. She could not see the lights from the lamps, but by holding her own above her head she could make out a sharp turn that cut her off from them. She thought of calling, but she knew she must come upon the others directly. She made the turn; still all was blackness in front of her. Then she became conscious that the dripping walls closed in more tightly, and that she must stoop as she

ran. The passage grew narrower, and the dank air was suffocating. Another step, and it was clear she would come into a wider part and see her friends. The annoyance she had first felt at being left, turned rapidly to anger, and from that to active fear. The place was so dim and unfamiliar, and she recalled all the superstitions about darkness that had been poured into her ears by colored servants since she was a baby. She stooped, and pushed through the narrow way that was not much larger than a manhole. Her light flickered uncertainly, and she stopped a moment to revive it, trembling lest it go out altogether. Then she ran on again, and as she stood straight in the shaft that had widened out, she gave a gasp of relief to see one of the lights ahead. She called out, and the figure turned, and threw the light so that she could distinguish the bearer. It was a huge, night-black African, who, surprised by her sudden appearance, gazed at her stupidly for a moment, and then, without dropping his pickax, came slowly toward her.

Now Bess Langhorne was not precisely a timid girl. She could drive a mouse out of a room, and she could kill a snake with the end of her riding whip, but it wouldn't be soothing to any girl to be lost in a coal mine, and find a negro giant armed with a pickax for her only companion. She fell against the wall, and clung to its rough stones for support, and the screams she tried to utter were as voiceless as those of a nightmare. The sight of her horror and fear probably afforded the negro his first suggestion. He came close to her, and threw the light so that it fell brightly on her face.

"Oh," he said, "you'se that pretty Langhorne g'ul, ain't yuh? Shuh enough yuh is. It wuz yo' pa that sent me up for three yeahs. I ain't even with him yet fo'—"

The negro's sentence remains unfinished to this day. From out of the darkness beyond him two large hands emerged. They coupled about the man's throat, and the sole of a heavy boot flashed close behind them. There was

a sudden step or two, a quick shuffle, a sharp cry from the negro, and he disappeared as though the earth had opened at his feet. The girl could hear the rattle and clatter of stones that fell after him, and the imprecations that arose as he splashed in water somewhere deep below. Then the man who had rendered such expert service turned with an explanation.

"It's an abandoned shaft, only forty feet or so deep. It won't kill him—more's the pity—but we'll let him stay there overnigh. Can I do anything for you?"

She was trembling, and on the verge of hysterics, but the man's voice was reassuring, and there was something large and honest in the coal-streaked face that steadied her.

"Oh, I can't thank you," she stammered, tremulously, "I was so frightened. I'm—I'm still so frightened, I—I—don't know how to thank you."

The miner picked up his dinner pail from where he had dropped it, and adjusted the cover.

"That's all right. Don't speak of it. My hands, you see," and he held one out, "were dirty already."

She took an uncertain step forward.

"If you'll help me to find the rest of my party—if you'll be good enough to go along with me—or if I could get out in the air for a minute! Oh, I'll never forgive Sir Arthur!"

The miner led the way out, keeping a respectful distance in front, and holding the light so that she might clearly see the rough path. She cried a little as she stumbled along, partly as a reaction from her fright, partly from anger at Sir Arthur, and a good deal from sympathy for herself; but the man gallantly gave no sign of seeing the tears. In spite of her nervousness she noticed that, and was grateful for it, and it came to her as a sort of solace that one could be so sure of finding chivalry among Southern men of all classes.

When they came to the main shaft and he made the car ready for her to ascend, offering to find the others of her party and send them up too, she held out her hand. She was calmer now, and

could think better what to say to a workingman who had perhaps saved her life. His large hand, black with coal dirt and roughened by the pick and shovel, closed over hers, and he stood embarrassed and uneasy, while she delivered her little speech.

"You have done me a wonderful service," she said, in her slow, mellow voice. "It's something I could never pay you for, but I want you to see my father—Judge Langhorne; I reckon you know him. I want you to see him, and he'll be sure to—to reward you. I don't mean in money"—hastily, as he drew his hand away—"of course not. I mean by helping you along some way, or getting you a better place, or something of that kind."

The man thanked her humbly, and gave the signal for the car to start. In a few minutes, the remainder of the party, led by the horrified and breathless Sir Arthur, joined her. There were apologies, tears and explanations. When they missed her, they had returned to the place where the mule had created the diversion. She was gone. They had searched for her in different directions. Then she described the route she had taken, and two or three of the mine bosses, gathered around, explained that she had mistaken the mule driver's directions, and taken the opening on the left instead of the right. They wanted to prove it by taking her down again—a suggestion she firmly set aside, inquiring about the identity of her rescuer. They could not answer, at first; the negro was working alone; no one else was supposed to be near there. She described the miner, recalling that he was tall and strong, and that under the disguise of dust one could discern handsome eyes and a clean-shaven face. They were still mystified; various names were offered and rejected.

"Oliver, perhaps," suggested one. "He has a way of wandering off from his work."

One at a time they reluctantly assented. Oliver it must be, though for themselves, they had never seen any signs of beauty about his mug.

The Englishman was impatient of the

discussion. He would have been glad to leave a piece of money for the fellow, but one never knows what to do among these strange people with their medieval ideas of honor. He leaped at Nan's suggestion that they go home, and on the way the coolness with which Bess had greeted him gave way to the normal friendly warmth under his humility, solicitude and multiplied self-censure.

A few days after the calamitous excursion, Bess, driving in her high cart into town, came across her miner on the way to work. He was walking ahead of her in a swinging gait that took him swiftly over the ground without in any way giving him the air of being in a hurry. It struck her with surprise that there should be so much ease and grace in the way a miner handled himself, and she reflected with some complacency that if one must be rescued from a bad predicament, it was satisfying to have one's rescuer a rugged, stalwart figure that would fit well into any romance. She viewed the broad line of his shoulders, the soldierly slimmness of the figure in the workman's blouse, and it occurred to her to regret that such proportions should be wasted on a man who had probably never even seen a dinner coat.

She reined in her mare, as she came up beside him, and the glimpse she had of his face verified her prediction that when the mask of grime had been removed, he would prove good to look at. He was tanned and bronzed to a ruddy brown, quite unlike the other miners, and his eyes looked out vividly, surprisingly blue from their dark setting. His features were strong and rather irregular, but there was a candor in their expression that in spite of his obvious occupation gave him the air of a gentleman. It was plain that he had recognized her at the first glance, but it was also apparent, as he stepped to one side to make way for the cart, that he did not expect to be recognized. That lack of assurance was all the encouragement Bess needed, and, as she drew in the lines, she said, in her soft, clipped speech:

"Good-mo'ning, Mr. Oliver."

He glanced up, surprised, and a hint

of amusement seemed to rest for a moment on the surface of his blue eyes; but he swept off his cap, and acknowledged the salutation gravely. The expression and the manner disconcerted her for a minute, but she harked back to her resolve.

"You seem to be late for work," she said. "I'm driving toward the mines. I'd be glad to give you a lift, if you're anxious to save time."

She had expected him to refuse the offer, either stolidly, or with embarrassment, but he did neither. He accepted promptly, seeming in no way discomfited nor over grateful for the invitation. He did not glance down at his clothes as he stepped lightly into the high cart. His ease of manner, she thought, could be accounted for only by his simplicity. She had heard of "nature's gentlemen," and it seemed she had discovered one, though she received a swift and discouraging perspective of the incident as her sisters would see and repeat it if it ever came to them. It was too late, however, to repent, and the sense of obligation was still strong in her.

"I am afraid," she began, "that you didn't understand me the other day. I was so frightened I didn't perhaps make myself clear. I asked you to come and see my father. I wanted him to thank you. I couldn't tell you how much he appreciates what you did."

The miner pushed his cap back, and laughed. It didn't seem just the thing for a man in his position to do, and she drew herself up a little stiffly.

"I understood you," he said. "It was awfully good of you, but I got more satisfaction than I earned when I dropped that rascal down a hole. I don't like to think that you feel there is anything more coming to me."

"But," she protested, "it was a—great service to me—to us, and if we could do something for you—just anything, any little thing, you know, we'd be so glad."

He seemed to reflect a moment before he answered.

"Well, you see, I don't exactly need anything. I like my place very well.

Most people don't think it's any fun to work in the mines, but I prefer it to some other things—things like—well, like hod carrying and work above ground."

"But your wages," she rejoined, with that fine patronage that comes so naturally where there are traditions of caste, and which loses all its sting when dispensed by a Southern voice, "your wages must be small and the work is so dangerous, and if you have a family —"

"But I haven't a family," he said, with no trace of resentment. "I haven't any one but myself to support, and I'm not extravagant—"

There was a pause. Then she spoke again, adapting herself nicely to his condition and position.

"I'm glad," she said, "to find one poor man who seems satisfied."

He surprised her again with that faint flicker of amusement in his glance. His sense of humor was a little distorted, she thought, even though he did know so well how to bear himself in other things. But she ignored the interruption.

"All the workingmen I have met before seem so dissatisfied. They always want to strike for higher wages, and they complain about their work. I don't blame them; I couldn't. They have dreary lives, I'm sure—all hard work and no pleasure. For instance, your own—isn't your life very empty and barren when your work is finished?"

He regarded her quite seriously for a space of time. She had never been more charming. The frosty air had brought a brilliant color to her cheeks, and the fine enthusiasm of sympathy and comprehension glowed in her dark eyes. She handled the reins well, holding them both between the thumb and first finger of her left hand, after a fashion unknown in city parks, but graceful and efficient like all her methods. She sat very straight, without any of the affectations of a "driving position," but with an air of animation and distinction that was as remarkable as it was free from consciousness. The young work-

man's glance was filled with only half-concealed admiration.

"Yes, it is barren," he said, jerking himself back to the subject. "It's barren enough—not much pleasure of any sort that counts. Why, I stop sometimes to think of Christmas. It'll be here in a few weeks, and I suppose I'll eat my dinner down on the third level of the mine. It will consist of four large pieces of Mrs. Smith's clammy bread, some underdone ham, a cold fried egg, and a slab of dried apple pie; but I think I'd rather take that down in the mine, and eat it out of my pail, than to buy a dinner somewhere and sit down to it alone."

To Bess Langhorne's sympathetic ear it sounded very terrible indeed. At home there would be a great house party, and turkeys and possums and fruit cakes, and plum puddings with burning sauce. There would be a Christmas tree, and presents for every one down to the littlest wee darkey. There would be mistletoe, and holly, and punch made after Marse Billy's own directions. There would be a barrel in the hall covered with pine boughs from which one could draw cider at any hour; and homemade candy, and blazing grate fires for roasting apples and popping corn. And there would be germans every night, and a Virginia reel, and a crowd of people about for two weeks who were there just to amuse themselves. And here this poor workman would eat a cold dinner out of a tin pail. She shuddered at the thought. It was intolerable, and if he wouldn't allow her to thank him for the service he had rendered her, she could at least insist on giving him his Christmas dinner. In a second she had planned it all—a table to himself in the servants' hall, with silver from the dining-room and some colored candles, and a dinner the like of which he had probably never seen. She would have a present for him, too, on the tree—a silk muffler of red and blue, such as all those men liked, and a pair of fleece-lined gloves. She pictured his pleasure to herself, and the grateful enthusiasm he manifested when she presented the invitation—not with-

out that instinctive regard for the magnificent distance between their stations, but with all warmth and graciousness—was assurance enough that she had hit upon the most successful method of paying the debt she owed him.

At the crossing of the town pike and the mine road, he swung himself out of the cart.

"You've been very good to me," he said, with a hand on the dashboard. "The lift has saved me a lot of time, and the invitation to Christmas dinner—well, you may be sure that's something I shan't be likely to forget. Why, Miss Langhorne, that'll be something to live for until Christmas."

He lifted his cap, and swung off down the path, and Bess, urging on the mare, said, half aloud:

"Who'd think one could pick up a man like that in a dirty coal mine?"

III.

Bess and Nan Langhorne, putting the last touches on the table already laid for twenty, were deep in a discussion that had brought color to both faces, and a very fierce and beautiful light to two pairs of beautiful Langhorne eyes.

"It wasn't fair," Bess was saying, accenting the arraignment with an oyster fork. "You knew that if I knew that man was to be invited, I should never have had the dinner. I'd have starved first, or eaten in the kitchen, or——"

"Eaten with the miner you have made such plans for," retorted Nan, grimly. "I'm not sure that wouldn't be the better plan anyhow. The fancy you seem to have taken to that—that—a—inferior person——"

She paused, awed a little by her sister's expression, and surprised at a sudden change she seemed to be making in the arrangement of the plates.

"What are you doing?" she asked, abruptly, and Bess, feverishly shuffling dishes about, replied hotly:

"I said I would not sit by Mr. Harding, and I shall not. I'd rather sit by that 'inferior person,' as you call him,

and I'm going to put him right here beside me. I've seen him often enough to know he'll not eat with his knife, and if he did, it would be better than sitting beside a man who knows that he's been invited to see if I'll do to marry."

Nan gasped, and upset a dish of almonds.

"Good heavens, Bess!" she exclaimed, "think of it! Sir Arthur'll be here, and everybody; and we'd be the talk for a century. Don't bring him in, and I'll never call him an inferior person again as long as I live, and you can have my whole box of bon-bons for him, and I'll not ask you for a cent for a year. I didn't really think you'd mind my inviting Mr. Harding. He's a dear, and I swear he hasn't an idea we ever mentioned marrying him to you—and if you'll just be sensible, he'll never notice you, and some of the rest of us'll marry him. I'll give you my word."

It wasn't in the Langhorne temperament to cherish anger, and as the color faded out of the elder girl's cheek she laughed, and reached over to help pick up the almonds; but she said, positively:

"That's all right. I'm sorry I was so cross, but I'm determined to bring Mr. Oliver in here. There wasn't any thought of our not being in the same class when he saved me from that dreadful creature in the mines, and I guess if he'll do for that, he'll do to sit beside me at dinner. If Mr. Harding is offended, he can discharge him, which is probably just what the prig will do."

Nan had it on her lips to protest that he was not a prig, but it seemed a useless argument, and she had about decided to abandon it, when the door opened, and Sir Arthur crept in.

"Just chuck me out," he entreated, "if I'm in the way, but there's such a crowd in there I came out here for a quiet word with 'you-all.' Jove, your table's a beauty. Mightn't I light the candles for you? I've had my life insured. I say, but it was good of you to ask me down for Christmas. I've told the fellows in New York about it, and I'm the most envied man on this continent. And what my mother would say to you for being so good to her darling

would just about include all the things I haven't words for."

He trotted about seeking matches and lighting the candles, getting under every one's feet, and talking all the time.

"I say," he went on, with the pride of original discovery, "that Harding fellow is something of a beauty. I think I heard you say once, Miss Bess, that you weren't keen for him; but, bless my soul, I think he's a good sort. Don't know when I've met up with such a ruddy, all-around lot as he looks to be."

Bess fixed him with a cold eye as she announced that everything was ready, and that they would return to the drawing-room.

At the door of the great room, where a noisy, laughing crowd was gathered about blazing fires, they came upon the judge talking to a young man.

"My eldest daughter, Mr. Harding," he said, a little nervously, knowing her sentiment. Bess drew herself up with hauteur, and lifted her eyes. But—was there not something familiar in the broad line of the shoulders, and the soldierly erectness of the figure in evening dress? And that irregular profile, the depth of bronze color—surely—

To the girl's eternal credit, except for one slight gasp, she gave no sign of surprise.

"Dinner has been announced," she said, sweetly, and took his arm.

At the table there was some confusion about plates, but a deft butler removed an extra cover and chair, and Mr. Harding took a place beside Bess.

"And you knew all the time," she said, as she unfolded a napkin. "I don't think I can ever forgive you."

He made a gesture of dismay.

"Don't say that; it was the only chance I ever got to see you or talk to you."

"It wasn't fair," she insisted.

He moved his plate a little nearer hers, to equalize the distance from that of the girl on the other side.

"Some one else was expected, wasn't there?" he asked.

"A Mr. Oliver," she answered. He raised his eyebrows.

"A common fellow," he said, with a shrug.

"Perhaps; but he has a sort of hard time, you know. Has to eat his Christmas dinner out of a tin pail; clammy bread, and cold eggs, and things."

"Too true; and that empty life outside of working hours excites one's sympathy, doesn't it?"

He laughed that short, gay laugh that had annoyed her at their second meeting, and in spite of herself she joined him.

After dinner, when the party had returned to the drawing-room, there were games, and dancing, and the distribution of presents, and a blue and red muffler and a pair of fleece-lined gloves were given to Mr. Oliver. And later, when there came a lull in the gayety and the company had divided into groups or couples, Sir Arthur found himself in a window seat with Nan.

"They seem to be getting on pretty well," he remarked, jerking his thumb toward a couple absorbed in each other, and all oblivious of the mistletoe over their heads. "For me," he went on, "I think I might just as well be making one of those little journeys to the homes of—my ancestors."

He caught a glance in the dark eyes of the younger sister that exactly responded to one in his own.

"That is," he corrected, "if you will go with me."

The couple under the mistletoe, deep in conversation, failed to see Sir Arthur quite openly kissing the girl's hand.

"You see," Harding was saying, "whenever I came here you were out. Something you had heard of me had made you hate me. I knew it—I could feel it, and so when Providence delivered you right into my hands, how was I to reject the opportunity?"

"But to go about in working clothes, and call yourself Oliver——"

"You forget, dear lady; it was you who called me Oliver, and the working clothes were not a part of the game. I do like to work in the mines, and I do it in preference to working at other things above ground. I find the miner's denims a good equipment for the work."

"But when I was offering you my father's good will——"

"I shall need it, I am sure."

"And inquiring about your wages——"

"I have forgotten it all, except that you commissioned yourself to relieve the barrenness and emptiness of a poor miner's life."

Their eyes met, and half the world's literature was in the look. Her glance faltered, and for one flashing second his finger-tips touched hers; and then, because human expressions are so limited, they laughed softly together.

The creature was certainly getting on.



THE LIMIT OF LEARNING

UNLESS one is truly and wondrously wise,

'Twill make him exceedingly nervous

To answer the questions they ask when he tries

For a place in the Civil Service.

But oh, there's a test that is harder than this

For showing the depth of one's knowledge,

And that is to chat with the erudite miss

Who has recently "finished" her college.

NIXON WATERMAN.

THE ART OF ENTERTAINING

By Mary Stewart Cutting

Author of "Little Stories of Married Life," Etc.

I WONDER why the women's clubs and the culture clubs and all the other improvement societies don't take up one extraordinarily neglected branch of education and study—the gentle art of entertaining. One charm of what is called smart society is that the art of entertaining is studied in some ways as part of the real business of life.

On the other hand, the woman who reads learned papers, which, like the Ark, have been a-preparing many days—who is deep in statistics and ethics, and the number of *verses* there are in the roads in Russia, and all the questions of the day—the woman, in fact, of whom you hear that appalling formula, that she can talk on any subject—the woman who can stand up before a hall full of people and discourse edifyingly for an hour at a stretch—is oftentimes the most uninspiring of hostesses in the little fourteen by fifteen drawing-room, filled with tables and chairs and lamps and a sofa and a piano and the palm and the rubber plant and Millet's "Gleaners" and the etching of the canal and the windmill which the Sunday school presented to her husband fourteen years ago.

I am not including any form of entertainment in which people sit around a table or tables and eat. Each person there has an excuse for his being, and is untrammelled at least by the demands of furniture; individual or general conversation may be had at desire. But I refer to those suburban evenings which are debarred from cards, either by the number or the nature of the guests—those evenings where there is a "company,"

which sits huddled in the only free part of the room into the form of a horizontal arch with the sofa as the keystone, varying, perhaps, only to close into a ring. Such evenings leave a long, long mark of weariness to add to those other benumbing influences on the brain, brought by the days of toil. Yet in many parts of this broad land there is no other form of entertainment known than the semi-circular one. There is but one cleared spot for people to sit, and to sit is the final law. You *must* sit where you have been put, it is expected. The hostess hurriedly shoves an extra chair into the ring if a man is seen unaccountably standing for a moment; and he doubles up into it weakly at once, to take his part later when his turn comes in anecdotal converse, very much as single experiences are given in some religious meetings. The ticket of entrance to this festal exercise are the fell words: "That reminds me of——"

Monologues are not conversation. Once in a hundred times this last is delightfully inspired among a dozen people in such a circle, and time is unheeded, and they go away cheered and indescribably uplifted and rejuvenated. But this is the exception. Nobody knows how it was done, or how to do it again—it is remembered with pathetic enjoyment.

How to entertain in small houses deserves indeed a monograph. One thing may be said: If you haven't space, try, oh, try to simulate it! A drawing-room which looks artistic and seductive as you view it from the doorway often becomes an awkward jumble of furniture with ten people in it—there is lit-

erally no place for them in the scheme of decoration. One wise woman I knew moved from a house to a flat, and although the front room was of a good size, left half of her prettiest chairs and tables in boxes in the cellar. The room repaid her forbearance. It breathed of hospitality. When furniture cannot be removed it can often be suppressed. The piano, for instance, needn't have every concession made to it, nor a corner that would cozily accommodate a group remain fenced off by a Morris chair.

How to get the right people into the right groups is the problem, and after the music or other entertainment which fuses them, to resolve them again into other groups if necessary. Two, or four, or even the decried three may often have soul-inspiring converse, or a downright interesting gossip; but as a usual thing not a greater number, unless some subject of the day is started with which every one has a cheerful fighting acquaintance. Even a very small room may be so arranged as to give a couple of grouping points. If people are allowed to stand instead of being wedged into contiguous chairs, they will insensibly wander toward what attracts.

Quite as important as the rule of making new combinations is the rule of not disturbing a combination of two which seems exceptionally fortunate. Don't haul in from the lower steps of the staircase the girl who plays so beautifully on the piano just as she has found a corner of refuge with the one young man. Give her a chance to shine

later, when she really wants to, and he can follow to turn the leaves for her. Don't let members of the same family, in their "party" clothes, sit half the evening together with heroic pretense of interest, while you are *tête-à-tête* with the interesting stranger. Don't separate ruthlessly the two men who used to go in on the same train together and are having a little heart-warming talk now. Don't leave that tall young man *too* long with the kind lady who knew him once when he was a baby, and *don't* let that shy girl sit by an elderly group at supper time, fumbling with her fork and plate, and trying to talk distractedly, with a desperate longing in her heart to get away—oh, to get away to that merry party in the hall, who are laughing uproariously! Don't leave the woman who needs distraction, and who teaches school in your town, to entertain the unknown visiting teacher from another. Don't— Ah, well! How to break up unfortunate combinations—to make fortunate ones—to suggest, to vivify, to elucidate—to sustain—to carry on four or five separate threads of interest, and bind them all finally into one—oh, it's an art, indeed! Many a tired and perplexed hostess has yearned inefficiently over her guests at their departing, conscious of the awful fact that they hadn't enjoyed themselves. Yet it isn't necessary to be a marquise of the vanished day of the French *salons* to make one's drawing-room a center of rest and charm and refreshment to those who enter it. It is an art that *can* be learned, even now!



AFTER

FEARLESS, I stare into the white-faced dawn,
 Fing'ring the raveled strands of Yesterday
 That slip and tangle, or weave lightly on,
 The imperfect patterns of a vanished May;—
 Alas! some wondrous, golden thread is gone,
 So frayed the fabric of my heart, and gray!

EMERY POTTLE.

THE DEFECT IN FELIX

A NEW YORK CHRISTMAS STORY

By Kate Jordan

(Mrs. F. M. Vermilye)

Author of "Time, the Comedian," Etc., Etc.

IT seemed unnecessarily cruel of Fate, or Chance, or Fortune, or whatever the Great Busybody should rightly be called who has every living creature for a customer, that a bitter acquaintance with himself should begin for Felix Warren on Christmas Eve.

It was a perfect Christmas Eve—white, windless, starry, after a day of sunshine with seeming diamonds in every bit of frost-crisped snow.

The hour lacked nothing, but his prosperous, self-indulgent life made up of "the little great, the infinite small thing," he now clearly realized, lacked something most important. The thought kept him staring into the fire as his servants stepped softly about the big studio, spreading the table for the midnight supper he was giving to his best loved friends, all children of fancy like himself—authors, actresses, playwrights, painters.

The bell rang for the first time as early as a quarter before eleven, and Andrew Reed, slim, blond and lazy, world-weary at twenty-three, strolled in, so much at home as he measured some whiskey and made a siphon gush, that Felix did no more than nod to him over his shoulder. He came to the fire with the glass, and, leaning against the mantel, eyed Felix thoughtfully.

"Isn't it well?" he asked.

"Oh, shut up," Felix groaned.

His face, boyish, although he was thirty-four, had a dull, gray seriousness. There was a look in his eyes a friend could not witness without a pulse of suf-

fering, as if something or some one had hurt him to the quick. Andy gave him an occasional look of real concern, but sipped in silence.

"I'll tell you something," Felix muttered, quietly, after a pause, and still looking into the fire. "It's just this: I'm a failure."

Andy swept him mockingly with his eyes.

"If you are, then I wish I were." He gazed at the high-ceilinged studio, rich in tapestries and paintings, at the long, raftered table in the fashion of wassail times, spread now with joints, fowls, vine-wreathed ale casks and pewter tankards. "It pays," he said, enviously.

"For the moment. But in ten years not one play that I've written will be alive."

Felix stood up, his long, dark eyes glancing restlessly. He moved about in his nervous fashion, touching a book, a chair, and speaking as if to himself:

"Nothing lasts in art except the real, and I'm as false as hell." He looked steadily into Andy's eyes. "Ideas come to me. I don't select the true. Those that twinkle are what I'm after, and brass, you know, has a pretty shine before it gets dirty. Out of these bits of brass I build a doll. I make it speak light and pleasant nothings, smart witticisms; it gives knowing nudges and pats on the back to the living dolls listening in the orchestra chairs. That's all. I'm popular, and royalties rush in, but ten years from now you'd have to bind and gag an audience to sit through

one of Felix Warren's plays. I'm a cheat, I tell you. It came to me to-day."

"Just came, out of heaven?" Andy asked, mockingly. Of course, Felix did not mean to be taken seriously.

"In a way; at any rate, it was a goddess who spoke the words."

"I'll bet you a box of my Egyptians the goddess had a name—Janet Ford," Felix nodded. "What did she say?"

"She said that after she'd studied one of my parts she ceased for a while to be a woman, with fingers, toes, hunger and thirst. She became too polite to have an ache, too bloodless for love. That's what she said of my heroines," he concluded, in a small, burning voice.

"That girl has the cheek of a horse," said Andy.

"She's the only one I know with the nerve to tell me the truth."

"She's not my style," said Andy, in a connoisseur's tone. "That big, leisurely, slender sort of Amazon with still, gray eyes that quietly measure you—"

"They do, indeed!" said Felix, bitterly.

"And half the time chuck you over as not worth while."

"So they do."

"Well, I don't want any in mine, thank you. She parts her heavy hair in the middle, too." Andy gave a shiver. "That's always awesome, particularly when other women wear it in a fuzzy bag over their eyebrows. Goddesses are not in my line—hard to live up to—they expect too much." Andy grew excited with his own eloquence. "They're out of tune with these cold, money-grabbing times. They haven't accepted the fact that there are no great passions nowadays."

"Janet says there are," said Felix, very softly.

The tone made Andy stare. He did not want his friend to love Janet Ford, or any other woman. The studio was so delightful as it was, and a wife made such a hodgepodge of a man's friendships.

Soul dissection came to an end with the opening of the door. A dozen

noisy, frost-flushed, hungry people came in. The place soon rang with laughter and the ale flowed into the tankards.

Janet Ford was in white. She treated Andy in her usual kindly, inattentive way, making him feel as if he were a kitten she had patted in passing. But he saw her quiet, glowing eyes fix themselves on Felix in a different way. Tenderness was there and flashes of sorrow. Andy thereupon became aware of an uncomplimentary truth. He could never care for Janet, chiefly because Janet could only by some miracle come to care for him; she did not count him in. But if she loved a man? The thought was startling. Any man, he felt, must love her, if she chose to try to draw him to her. She was beautiful, subtle. Every little gesture and look had sub-meanings that fascinated. She was different from the other women. She played the game of life differently. She was dangerous.

"If she wants to marry Felix she'll do it," Andy thought, miserably. "Telling him all that rot about his work and making him miserable is just her soft, catty way of getting a hold on him, I'll bet. Other women flatter him to death—chase him. Of course, she wouldn't. It's all up with him. Another man overboard."

The merrymaking, a Christmas far-rago of punch, songs, holly and firelight, was kept up till almost three o'clock, then in ones and twos the guests began to drift away. Janet was among the last to go. She came toward Felix in her flapping white cloak, a large hood over her head, whose edge of fur made a dark, soft frame for her face. Fatigue always deepened her beauty, and Felix thought there was nothing in the world as lovely as her tired mouth and heavy eyes. She came very close to him, drawing on her loose gloves, and laid her full, soft, loving gaze upon his face.

"I won't have you come home with me, Felix," she said; "Johnny Spencer goes my way, you know."

"But I want to go. I was looking forward to it. Please let me," he said,

so disappointed, he felt as if suddenly set down from a height.

"No," said Janet, looking down at her gloves; "you won't want to come when I tell you what I've done. I'll be glad to slip out of your sight quickly, and," she said, with a sad, little laugh, "you'll be glad to see the last of me."

"What do you mean, Janet?" He felt a crisis edging toward him.

"I hope you'll forgive me," she said, softly and very clearly, with trouble in her eyes. "Please try to forgive me," she sighed. "You know to-day I was frank about your work. You asked me. I was honest with you."

"You were, indeed," Felix murmured.

"It won't surprise you, then, to know I can't play *Mona* in 'The Cross Roads,'" she rushed on rapidly, almost in a whisper. "I've written to Derrickson, giving up the part."

The words seemed to him the cruellest mortal lips could frame. He was prodded in his most sensitive point. Janet felt the shock and hurt pour from his eyes, although his self-control was cold. She lifted her head and spoke without emotion.

"It seems unkind, Felix, but I had to do it—and I had to do it quickly, without consulting you, or I might have weakened. I simply could not play that part. I hated her. In every situation she was lacking. She spoke words as truths that everything in me knew to be lies. I could not live her vapid, namby-pamby life for hours every night—I could not. I'd have ruined the play for you and have hurt my own reputation. Some one who can feel *Mona* to be real, or who doesn't mind if she isn't, can play her—I can't." She held out her hand. "Do you understand?"

He looked at her in open misery and pressed her hand. It was difficult to speak.

"You were quite right," he said, formally.

"Are you angry?"

"No, indeed, no!" He smiled. "No doubt I'm under an obligation to you."

When she was gone with the rest and he was alone, he felt he must get out into the cold air and walk. He wanted

to think clearly. He had often before felt a friendship in the winter quiet of the park, as if the night listened and the silence advised. But after an hour under the frost-encased trees and the great stars, he came back with a feeling of self-knowledge, helplessness and dismay. He was exact in his self-judgment, and he knew himself to be a trifler by taste, an expert in life's littlenesses.

While his own heart was shut fast, he could never write a play to make the heart of a listener ache. Mentally he desired to stand well in Janet's eyes, and his disappointment was mental. This was the fault in him. He did not suffer like the usual man. No one was really necessary to him. He did not feel himself a part of the big, human tragedy, and with a cold shrug he had, in a way, crossed it out.

Janet had made him feel his defect. She had a heart that could know storms and joys in the real living sense. She was the quick and he the dead. She was the natural woman, and he was only intellect, finely constructed mechanism.

Shivering, he let himself into the big studio building. The elevator was not running in the small hours, and he had to climb to his studio under the roof, up the iron, twisting, ladder-like stairs. From preference he had his place on the top floor because of the panorama of rooftops, mist and lights seen from his big windows, and shot up as he usually was by means of the elevator he knew little of his neighbors on the other floors except the few who were his acquaintances.

This morning as he toiled up, his chin sunk in his fur coat, he looked at the different doors without curiosity, yet interested in a pointless way as he passed without pause. For the first time he found there was a teacher of dancing in one, a school for stenography in another, dozens of artists, teachers of languages, even a manicure.

He had reached the fourth floor with but one more stair to climb, when a sound made him pause and look over the banisters. He had heard the flap of a woman's gown and a choked exclamation that might have been a stifled

laugh, or a cough, or a sob. He knew it was the latter, after a second, for it came again, a dreary sound in the still, bare strip of hall where the unshaded gas jet spluttered in the draught.

The door to the right of the stairs, standing partly open, was pushed wide, and a young woman, of perhaps twenty-four, came out. Felix saw she was half disrobed, wearing a street jacket over a petticoat, her feet in worsted slippers, pale, shining hair lying in a slipped coil between her shoulders. She moved up and down the hall as a distracted animal might have done, from her own door to one farther down, at which she paused and listened, then on to another and back again.

At one door she knocked and waited. No answer coming, she went to the other and knocked softly first and then loudly. There was no answer to this, either, and she came back. Her mouth was open, her eyes wild.

"Oh! oh!" she groaned.

Felix ran down the steps and faced her at her door. He had scarcely asked, "What's the matter?" before she pulled him across the threshold.

"Oh, please come," she said, in a little, shivering voice of pain; "I'm so frightened."

The room was meagerly furnished; there was a cheap striving after artistic effects. The high gas was lighted and laid all the secrets of the place bare. It was a makeshift home. He caught a glimpse of a gas stove behind a gaudy screen; a curtain pushed back left washing utensils exposed; but the chief object in the room, which held his attention from the moment of entrance, was a low, wide couch of the comfortless sort, that could be folded on occasions into something quite different, and which held the body of what seemed a dead man.

He was about thirty; with dark hair mixed with gray; delicate, emaciated features; sunken eyes shut finally; slender, beautiful hands lying open in serene surrender.

The girl had been talking incoherently, bending over the couch, pressing her lips to the set face in importunate

agony. Felix went closer, struggling to say something comforting. He saw now the man was not dead. Breath was coming through his nostrils faintly, and each time this grew stronger. But the sound was as hopeless as the silence had been; it was automatic; there was no life or fullness in it; it was like the worn clack of a clock running down. The girl's eyes were on Felix, reading his face with a terrible knowledge.

"He isn't going to die," she said, the whisper a fierce declaration and an exploring question. "The doctor said he wouldn't——" she mumbled, then stopped and reached over to Felix wildly. "You think he will."

Felix could only look at her in sadness.

"Haven't you any relative you want me to go for?" he asked, softly.

"No," she whimpered; "I haven't any one but him." Tears gathered in her staring eyes. "Is he going to die?"

"I'm afraid so," said Felix. "Better face it—I'm so sorry for you—but, really, you know——"

"To die." The words came in a hollow voice; she was trying to look the awful reality in the face; her lips fluttered like small, gray leaves. "Oh, my darling! My darling! My Davy!"

She knelt down and put her arms around him as if he were a child, pressing her face to his, her eyes closed. A shiver passed over Felix; he felt a dizziness as he looked at these two. The girl had forgotten him.

"My darling," she kept saying. "My Davy."

The words were unlike anything he had heard in life or on the stage. This was raw desolation. This was the tearing apart of invisible tentacles, and he could feel that beyond the reach of human sight they were bleeding hard.

She looked up at last.

"Won't he speak again?" she blurted, thickly, sodden anguish weighting her face; "not for a minute?"

"I—I'm afraid not—poor little thing."

"Davy," she whispered against his cheek. "I love you. I've loved you

every minute. I've never been sorry. You used to think so—but never, never, never. Oh, Davy, can't I keep you?" she sobbed, helplessly. "All the months of pain—for this. Oh, God, why must he die? I want him. I need him."

Felix crossed to the side where she knelt and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You'll make yourself ill," he said, feeling a man's awkwardness as a comforter, "and you mustn't, you know—it isn't any use."

"No use," she said, bitterly, without looking at Felix; "that's it; no use. I had to see him grow poorer and poorer, and his sketches come back, and it was no use beating against it. I had to see him grow ill, and I was glad to work for him, but it was no use. And now—oh, oh, I can't keep him!" She gazed closer into the sinking face with a horror that was new despite her hopeless words. "He's dying—now."

The last breath had passed the fever-burnt lips, and the stillness that is as much a part of life as being born, now lay between the living and the dead. Already the man was *different* from the two beside him; a tick of the clock, and from a human being breathing away the remnant of life, he had become a body, the mystery that had made him himself gone out of him as mysteriously as it had come.

Felix could not speak. The look on the girl's face was so panic-struck, as of one groping, astray, his arm was slipped around her unconsciously. A vivid sense of a vast, merciful kinship wrapped them about. Felix knelt with this stranger beside her dead. Something warm, keen and sweet had broken bonds within him and trickled through his blood.

Her weeping had ceased. She became numb and very quiet, very obedient, too. She let him lead her to a chair. She watched him as he drew the sheet over the dead man's face and reverently closed the curtains hanging each side of the couch.

"You must think of yourself a little, now," said Felix. "You're very weak. What have you had to eat?"

"I forget," she said, sitting back and

clasping her hands resignedly, her gaze on the closed curtains.

"See here," said Felix, in a business-like tone; "I'll be back in a moment. You won't mind being alone for a moment?"

She shook her head. Crimson stains of exhaustion lay under her eyes. Felix hurried out. The night was cold, the room he had left badly heated, but his face was burning and damp; his heart gave full, fierce beats. His man was asleep, but he went alone to the small, well-equipped kitchen and filled a plate from the ice box with cold chicken, tongue, bread, and as he repassed the sideboard, he caught up a decanter of sherry.

His charge sat where he had left her. Except that her head had fallen forward, she had not moved. When he aroused her he could see by the fresh amaze that she had forgotten him. Nothing was real to her but her grief.

He cajoled her into drinking some sherry, and felt rewarded as the look of age lifted a little from her face. It was necessary to tempt her with bits of the chicken as one would an unreasonable child. With difficulty she nibbled it. As she met his compassionate eyes, tears filled her own.

"You've been very kind," she said. She bit her lip to keep back a sob, and said, with a cold awe: "And so it's all over—all, all over."

"I want to talk to you a little. May I?"

"Oh, yes," she murmured, indifferently.

"About yourself. I want to help you," he said, drawing a chair to her side.

"You have—so much."

"I mean—about other things," Felix said, with difficulty, for the stereotyped business that follows death in civilized countries, the ghastly formula of funerals, was odious to his artistic sensitiveness. "Things will have to be attended to. You'll need help. You have relatives. Tell me how to get them here."

She shook her head. He saw she was making an effort to speak.

"No, I belong to no one, and all of David's relatives are in England. There are plenty of lonely people like us in New York—the *incogniti*, David used to call us. I came from a Western city. My father is dead. My stepmother and her children are nothing to me. Here I was too poor to make real friends. You don't know how I worked and what work can make of a woman. Of course, I know a few poor people like myself, girls toiling at one thing or another, but I must not trouble them now. What could they do for me?"

"Hadn't your husband friends?"

"Yes, a few artists like himself. The manicure, too, downstairs, used to come in and play the banjo sometimes, at night. She's gone away for Christmas—oh, what does it matter?" she moaned with abrupt wildness. "What does it matter? Davy's dead. Please go away and leave me here with him."

"He was ill a long time?" Felix persisted.

"It's three months since he went to bed."

"And you've been here, alone, fighting your way, all this time?"

She resented the pity in his tone.

"And nappy to do it," she said, with passion. "Oh, how we loved each other! To see him suffer—that hurt! But the work—why, I was glad to do it." Her lips trembled; when she spoke again her voice was dreamy, as if she talked to herself. "I taught stenography in the other room. After classes I did typewriting, so I was able to nurse him between times. I used to read aloud to him at night after my work was over. He used to say the sound of my voice put him to sleep so soothingly. In the morning I used to drink my coffee, sitting on his bed and reading the morning paper to him. He was so hungry for the news. He couldn't hold the paper. The paralysis came on the right side first."

"When were you married?"

"Six years ago. We spent our honeymoon in Cuba. He had to go there to make sketches. Three weeks we were there." She smiled wanly. "I'm glad he had that time to remember. We used

to talk about Cuba. Did you ever hear the Cuban national hymn? It's beautiful. We used to listen to it every night on the plaza in Matanzas."

Her hands shot up with startling suddenness to her face. She broke into unrestrained sobs. It was frantic weeping.

"Oh, oh, my God," she cried out; "he'll never speak to me again!"

Felix stood up. His eyes were wet. Some one was needed here who could get more nearly to a woman's heart than he. As he stood over her in helplessness he felt oppressed by a masculine clumsiness and tactlessness. He did not know what to say or do. He had sustained her, made her eat, and he was going to give further aid and money, but something subtle, beautiful, and wonderful was needed for the girl who was writhing before him in the leash of memories.

There was something in her face that recalled a picture he had seen of Christ's mother as darkness came down upon the cross, such a look as only a woman's face could wear, and in a flash the instinct that had been prodding him became an inspiration. He would go for Janet. This was work for her. She would know what to do. As he thought of her the magnetic power and calm of her presence seemed already shed over the poor place.

"I'm going to leave you for half an hour," he said, looking at his watch; it was past four. "Will you lie down?" he asked, trying to lead the girl to a couch.

She pushed him away blindly.

"Don't bother about me. It doesn't matter about me."

"Please don't cry any more. I'm going for some one that can help you, poor child—"

He could see she was not listening. She turned away, sick with grief, laid her crossed arms on the table and her face upon them, her hair falling like a curtain shutting out the savorless world. Felix took off his big coat, and as lightly as possible laid it over her hunched shoulders.

This was the picture that stayed with him, as, having got another coat, he

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This was the picture that stayed with him, as, having got another coat, he

hurried into the still, icy streets—this and the last, long look from her tear-sodden eyes as she had muttered: "It doesn't matter about me." He hurried as if for a train he had barely time to catch, glancing about for a car or cab. But at that hour, "the hour of innocence," the town was as quiet as a church. The cessation of life and toil had reached an apex, quivering like a tongued wave just before breaking again into the usual human strife.

It was a long walk to the apartment house where Janet and two young women friends were testing the virtues of co-operative housekeeping, but he had to keep on until a quarter of a mile from it before a battered cab came into view, the driver drowsy, the horse jaded. Felix climbed into the stained, musty-smelling interior, and was jogged on. He had the man wait at Janet's door. He was really on her door mat before the untimeliness and unreality of his quest impressed him. But the other urgency in his awakened soul wiped out smaller considerations, and he pressed the electric bell.

Very soon there was an alarmed whispering beyond the door, followed by an impressive pause. He rang again; more whispering; then a thin, apprehensive voice:

"Who's there?"

"Mr. Warren—Felix Warren. I want to speak to Miss Ford. Please say it's very urgent."

After a patter of bare feet and more astounded whispering, he heard Janet's deep, soft voice:

"In a few minutes, Felix."

He went down the hall and stood at a window looking at the lights of the city. Even after his two long walks and wakefulness in the dead hours, he was not fatigued. He was tingling, trembling; his brain was open to the subtlest impressions. He had been face to face that night with two of life's verities, love and death, and they had worked a marvel in him.

He looked out at the winking lights high up; they seemed never-sleeping eyes. The under flare of the city from the rayless bulk below took on a nebu-

lous body; it was a phantom that seemed to pull him by the sleeve and put in remembrance the host of prismatic illusions that had flowered in his pure heart when he had pored over "Julius Cæsar" at college, and longed to be like Brutus. His gaze wandered from roof to roof. The silence to his quickened senses was a vibrating thing. Thoughts of eternity, and of the anguish, sin and disappointments of earth came into his sad musings. He seemed looking through the walls and roofs of the seemingly tranquil city to the unsatisfied hearts they hid and the sorrows they were graves for. He had never felt like this before.

But keenest of all was the thought of love, the real love that endures through failure and suffering of every sort, which even the soiling and stress of poverty only deepen. It was here, at hand, side by side with commerce and noise, in ugly streets and cramping rooms, just as it had been in the days when the Crusaders rode away with their ladies' amulets upon their hearts. Love was not dependent on its dress or home. It was the lasting, human need of two for each other, and where it was real it was eternal. Janet had always said so. He had been blind, and deaf, and unbelieving. But Janet was right.

"Felix," he heard her say, "I've called you twice."

She was outside her door, smiling at him. She had dressed hastily, and for the moment. A loose domino of black satin showed the tumbled lace of her nightgown against her throat; her heavy hair had been pinned up without care; flapping Turkish slippers were on her feet; a misty look of sleep lingered in her eyes. When he came close to her she gave an indrawn breath of concern.

"What's the matter? I can't ask you in; the girls sleep on the divans, you know. What's the matter?"

"Get ready, and I'll tell you about it as we go uptown. I've a cab waiting."

"Then you're not ill?"

"No. Please hurry."

"But, Felix, what can it be? You really want me to go with you at this mad hour?"

"It's just this. I stumbled upon a little tragedy on the floor below me. A man died there. His wife, a poor, young thing, needs you. I don't know what to do—feel like a fool—she's alone, desperate, and I thought——"

"I'll come," said Janet, with her usual soft decision, and with a nod she went in.

Twenty minutes later they were being driven uptown together. Janet could not take her eyes from Felix; she watched him covertly. He was very silent, very pale, but she felt that speaking quiet which surcharges a pause between two, akin in spirit, when heart and brain are turbulent. He gave her only bare details of the scene he had passed through after his walk in the park, and feminine instinct, independent of facts, pieced out the story. She knew the transition that had taken place in Felix that night better than he did himself. It was a joyous discovery. Her heart went out to him. This was the Felix she had dreamed of knowing, and the man she had felt she could love.

Chimes for earliest Christmas mass were pealing from the steeples of some Catholic churches, and milk carts were rumbling along the dark streets, when they stopped at Felix's door.

"The elevator doesn't run till seven, you know," he said. "I'm sorry. Let's go slowly."

"My dear Felix," said Janet, making an impertinent face, "never apologize to a woman for having to climb stairs—there's a flavor of age and rheumatics in the regret. Observe my gazelle-like lightness, if you please. I may die, but I shall not puff."

The house was silent save for their footsteps. At each landing the light flared into Janet's beautiful, contented face, and upon the pallor and seriousness of Felix's. At the third floor they paused.

"Wait a moment, Janet," Felix said; "I want to speak to you before we go in. We couldn't talk of ourselves there. I want to thank you for what you said to-night—or, rather, this morning—in the studio, about *Mona*."

"Yes, Felix?" she asked, softly, with happy eyes.

"It was so true. I didn't think so then—not really. But I know it now, Janet. Life has been passing me by," he said, going nearer and taking her hand; "but it isn't too late to catch up, and I mean to. This Christmas morning will stand out forever in my life, and this moment as I stand here with you."

She laughed softly, triumphantly.

"I always knew you had this in you, but you beat it back, you starved it. Oh, Felix," she said, in a thrilling little voice, "please promise you'll ask me to play in your next play."

Felix looked at her with burning love.

"That and more——" he hesitated.

He heard her sigh. Her soft, compelling eyes clearly invited him.

"I love you, Janet. I loved you long ago, but I didn't know it. I love you very, very much."

She gave him her lips, murmuring his name. They went up the stairs with locked hands and brought their new happiness into the room where love was weeping.



NOVEMBER

THE swamp-tree sighs, and the thin, sharp reed,
The wire-grass whines, and the stiff, brown weed,
The lone hill-mullen stands dumb and tall,
The low clouds hover, the long rains fall.
The gray shapes gather; they vigil keep
By the bed of beauty fallen asleep.

JOHN VANCE CHENEY.

THE DOLLS' HOSPITAL

By Richard Burton

IN a little old building, up under the roof,
Where you grope your way to the door,
The Hospital hides, and it seems aloof
From the city's rush and roar.
And here, to be tinkered as good as new,
Come the battered dolls at last,
Who have lived with children the long year through,
The favorites of the past.

High and low, they are hither borne,
Troops of them fill the place;
The fine French miss with her look of scorn,
And the rag baby, meek of face.
'Tis said, could you visit the wards by night,
When the grown-ups are all away,
You would witness then a wondrous sight
That you never will see by day.

For the small doll people foregather there,
The maimed and the mended all,
The limping beaux and the faded fair,
For a talk and a festival.
They dance to music, their limbs grow fleet,
They feast with a right good cheer,
Their tiny laughter shrills high and sweet,
Each walks with his chosen dear.

But, best of all, when the dance is done,
They chat of their checkered fates,
Of all doll-doings under the sun:
Their griefs, and their missing mates;
The sudden splendors, the chance and change,
The violence and the bliss;
And they whisper: "The thing called Life is strange!"
Then they say good-night, with a kiss.

In the morning, never a doll has stirred,
And daylight has dimmed their charms;
You could swear that nothing at all occurred
Save the mending of legs and arms!

LITTLE DOLORES

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF PARIS

From the French of Marcel Prévost

AS a child I was very religious, from which it does not follow that I became wholly irreligious as I grew in years. The great feast days of the church, which even now stir me with sympathetic emotion, formerly filled my soul with an ardent yearning for holiness. They marked periods in my spiritual development toward which I looked forward; and from them I dated my moral progress. At the present stage of my life—to use a church phrase—I am not less humbled by my imperfections, but I have no longer the same trust in good resolutions to effect a sudden change in my inner self. I am content to take care of my moral machinery to the best of my power, leaving any alteration in the wheelwork to the charge of the mysterious Creator of it, should He deem such change advisable.

Until I was ten years old, I lived with my parents in a house in the Rue de Ponthieu, off the Champs Elysées. The house is still standing. Now and then I go out of my way to look fondly on its faded façade. I see the door from which I made my first entrance into the world, holding the hand of my mother or of my nurse. (From the very beginning we are guided by a woman's hand.) I glance furtively at the paved courtyard, I glimpse at the windows of the floor on which we lived. It was pleasantly situated, looking out on one side on the few trees of a garden that was cut off, unfortunately, by high stone walls. I should not like to cross the threshold of the house now. I should be fearful of scaring into flight the phantoms that for me still inhabit

the place—my parents, myself a child—and Dolores, the little girl from Venezuela.

Dolores was past eleven, and I was about nine and a half years old, when she and her mother moved into the house in Rue de Ponthieu. They occupied the floor above us, and kept two servants, one of whom was a mulatto. The mother, apparently, was a pretty woman. All I can remember of her is a penetrating odor of musk, a lot of black lace and yellow ribbon, and her hair. It was of such a singular blond shade that it excited my curiosity. One of the first questions I asked Dolores after we became acquainted was:

"Tell me, will you, is your mamma's hair really her own?"

Dolores had a charming, mischievous little face, surrounded by fuzzy curls. She blushed through her dark skin at my inquiry.

"What a little silly you are!" she said to me. "Why, of course mamma's hair is really her own. And it reaches down below her knees, too. But she tints it with a certain kind of water, that costs an awful lot. Your mamma doesn't use that water to color her hair because it costs too much."

It hurt my feelings to have her say that my mother could not afford to buy that water for the hair; at the same time, however, I consoled myself with the reflection that I would be sorry to have my mother tint her beautiful dark auburn hair.

This interchange of opinion, and all that followed, took place in the Champs

Elysées, where my governess used to meet the mulatto guardian of Dolores. At home I would give a faithful account of my talks with the little Venezuelan, what she said and what I said in reply. Thus I came to inform my parents of a project that Dolores and I had formed. We intended to be married as soon as we should be grown up. The fact that Dolores was two years my senior had not escaped us. She had covered that objection by the simple statement that, "when people grow up, two years more or less don't make any difference."

I must admit that my parents did not seem to attach much importance to my announcement.

All my father said was:

"I don't care to have the boy get too well acquainted with the daughter of that woman."

"But she's such a child," my mother replied, indulgently. "And Maria says she is very well behaved."

Maria was my governess, a Gascon of fifty years, in whom my mother had absolute confidence.

From that moment I was on the alert, and my ears were stretched whenever they said anything about the lady with the yellow hair. My attention was rewarded with various information. First of all, despite the boast of Dolores about being rich, I learned that the lady with yellow hair did not pay her bills regularly. Then, several tenants had made complaints. I did not learn what the complaints were about; but I did hear is said that, "the *conciérge*, well-fed with tips, took the side of the Venezuela lady before the landlord." Moreover, I made a discovery by personal observation. The window in our dining-room opened on the yard. For a whole hour at a time I used to flatten my nose against the pane, watching the people coming in and going out of the house. I noticed three gentlemen who came regularly into the courtyard. One, who had gray hair and a venerable gray beard, stepped out of his coupé every day at about five o'clock. Another man, whose age I couldn't judge very well, came always early in the afternoon. He was very tall, clean-shaven and energetic, almost violent in

appearance. The third man looked as though he might be a compatriot of Dolores. Like hers, his complexion was the shade of a lemon scarcely ripe. His hair was black as shoe polish, short and curly. It chanced that he reached the house always after the older man had gone away. They never happened to meet, either.

I asked Dolores whether these gentlemen were friends of her mother's. The little girl, looking me straight in the eyes, said, with an assured air:

"Oh, yes. The old gentleman is my godfather. He's very nice, and I'm fond of him. The gentleman who hasn't any beard or mustache is a rich American, we met at Coburg last year."

"And the one with black hair?"

"He's mamma's cousin."

"Your mamma doesn't have lady visitors, does she?"

Once again Dolores' dark cheeks flushed.

"No," she replied; "mamma says ladies are not nice. And, do you know, you bother me with all your questions."

After that I never spoke to Dolores of her mother's callers. We continued to be good friends despite her somewhat fantastic character.

December had set in, and the soiled snows of Paris had begun to sully the Champs Elysées and the Tuileries. One morning my father met Dolores in the courtyard. She was being taken out by her mulatto nurse. The child smiled at him. My father went up to her, spoke a few words, and, as he turned away, stooped and kissed her little round cheeks. That night at dinner, he said, before me:

"Maria is right. That little Dolores is a sweet child, and seems well behaved. What a pity she can't be taken from the surroundings in which she lives!"

"It is sad," returned my mother. "Think—in four or five years she'll be a young woman!"

After a pause, my father said, finally:

"There should be some society to rescue little ones like her. No work could be more meritorious, more Christian."

They said no more before me. Naturally, I did not fully grasp their meaning. Yet a child's comprehension—anybody may verify the statement from his memories—is easily satisfied. A child must have an answer to his curiosity; but he does not dispute the answer. I asked Maria, my governess, why it was advisable to remove Dolores from her present surroundings.

"Because her mother is not a proper person," replied Maria. "She doesn't have nice people call on her."

I was fully content with this explanation; and from that moment a plan began to take shape and grow in the recesses of my conscience. The solemnity of Advent had, as usual, awakened in me the desire to perform some works of exceptional piety. Since my father himself had said that no work could be more meritorious or more Christian than the saving of Dolores, it seemed to me that this was a duty Providence had laid at my hands.

Just then my parents and I were preparing to go into Gascony to spend the Christmas and New Year holidays. We went each year, and stayed at the house of my grandmother, on my father's side. That this grandmother, who never had denied me anything, should refuse to receive Dolores, never for a moment occurred to my mind. So Dolores would live in Lot-et-Garonne until we were married. Neither her mother of the yellow hair, nor the three gentlemen callers, would ever think of going down there to find her.

The project, which revealed no great acquaintance with laws or customs, was the more attractive, not only because it meant the redemption of Dolores, but because it meant a great sacrifice for me. I should not see the little Venezuelan any more, or at least I should see her only for a few weeks each year. This thought wrenched my heart. In anticipation I tasted the savory bitterness of trial. The folks around me even noticed my air of superior resignation. To tell the truth, I felt myself quite a hero, and had sentiments of pity for people who neither knew nor envied my detachment from mere creature joys. I wished

to go even further in my zeal, to attain to the summit of Christian sacrifice. My whole fortune consisted of forty-seven slowly saved francs. I had been keeping them to buy a gun for when I should be allowed to shoot larks down in Gascony. I resolved to give this money to Dolores for the expenses of her journey. For, you see, she would have to go away without her mother's knowledge. I began to look upon myself as a kind of Francis of Assisi, stripped of the goods of this world, and thinking only of the welfare of others. And I prepared for the sweet season of the Nativity in a mood of mystic serenity, streaked with a notable dash of pride that I tried to disguise from my secret self.

Since that time I have observed the same attitude in a great many who profess the height of Christian virtue. And the career of a saint seems to me to-day to be thickly sown with snares.

I had selected the last Sunday in Advent as the day to disclose my design to Dolores. It was very cold that winter. Our maids had taken us to the Bois de Boulogne, where skating had begun. Our interview took place on the shores of the upper lake. Dolores listened to my scheme with that curious meditative expression of a little monkey, that gave her such a comical air.

"So your grandmother has invited me to stay at her house," she said, when I had done.

"No," I replied. "I invite you to my grandmother's house. It's the same thing. And here's forty-seven francs for your fare. I had saved the money to buy a gun to shoot larks down there."

She took the two louis and the silver pieces with a quick movement, looked at them a moment, then put them in her pocket, saying:

"Thank you." She kissed me, and added: "Shall I stay down there as long as you are there?"

"You'll stay there always. Until we're old enough to get married."

"You're crazy. Mamma wouldn't allow that."

Without daring to look Dolores in the face, I stammered:

"Your mamma won't know where you are. You must not tell her anything. You'll start in the evening, after us. You can get away while one of her callers is at the house. And you'll never see her again—never!"

When I said this we were quite alone at the opening of one of the little alleys that lead down to the lake. The frozen, shriveled soil under foot, the swollen lawn powdered with hoarfrost, the bared roots of a great maple that stood at the angle of the pathway—I can see them all now, and also the two dear little black boots of Dolores, that I had kept my timid eyes on the while I spoke. As she made no reply, I took heart, and looked up at her.

She seemed transformed into some kind of savage little animal, with furious eyes, nails clinched in her palms, and grinding teeth, as though she was about to leap on me to tear and rend.

"Dolores!" I gasped.

"If you ever," she ground the words between her teeth, "if you ever say again what you've just said, I'll—I'll——"

She was unable to utter another word. Her face, her whole poor little body suddenly relaxed, and she burst into tears, falling softly and affectionately on my shoulder.

Two days later, Christmas Eve, my parents and I left Paris to go down into Gascony.

Between the little Venezuelan and me there was no further discussion of my plan for her redemption.

But the day after our scene in the

Bois she came and told me in the most matter-of-fact way:

"You know the forty-seven francs you gave me. Well, I'm going to buy a big diamond that I saw in a shop on the boulevard. It's not real, of course. The real ones cost too much."

We bade each other farewell, promising to write. I wrote to Dolores, but she did not answer my letter. My holidays were rather gloomy, and all the time I prayed fervently that Heaven should preserve my little friend from the vague perils that encompassed her.

When we returned to the Rue de Ponthieu in the last days of January, I found that the floor above us was unoccupied. Dolores, her mother and the two servants had moved. Doubtless the *conciërge*, dissatisfied with her Christmas present, had refused to uphold the family any longer, and the landlord had given them notice to vacate.

I wept grievously at the loss of my little friend, and my mother did her best to console me. In my grief, I revealed to her my plan to save Dolores. Up to that moment I had guarded it in jealous secrecy.

My mother smiled a little as she heard the story, but from the way she kissed me I felt sure she was rather pleased with me than not.

"And what became of your forty-seven francs?" she asked.

"Dolores told me she would keep them to buy a diamond," I replied, in all sincerity.

It seemed to me that my mother became suddenly pensive, and I thought I saw tears stealing into her eyes.

"Poor little Dolores," she murmured.

REST

AGAINST the shoulder of the hill
That brings the azure near,
I rest my head and dream at will,
Earth's beating heart I hear.
Dear Mother Out-of-doors, how still
Thine eyes are, and how clear!

ISABELLA HOWE FISKE.

TOO MUCH GOLD

By Jack London

Author of "Local Color," "The Call of the Wild," Etc.

THIS being a story—and a truer one than it may appear—of a mining country, it is quite to be expected that it will be a hard luck story.

But that depends on the point of view. Hard luck is a mild way of terming it so far as Kink Mitchell and Hootchinoo Bill are concerned; and that they have a decided opinion on the subject is a matter of common knowledge in the Yukon country.

It was in the fall of 1896 that the two partners came down to the east bank of the Yukon, and drew a Peterborough canoe from a moss-covered *cache*. They were not particularly pleasant-looking objects. A summer's prospecting, filled to repletion with hardship and rather empty of grub, had left their clothes in tatters and themselves worn and cadaverous. A nimbus of mosquitoes buzzed about each man's head. Their faces were coated with blue clay. Each carried a lump of this damp clay, and whenever it dried and fell from their faces more was daubed on in its place. There was a querulous plaint in their voices, an irritability of movement and gesture, which told of broken sleep and a losing struggle with the little winged pests.

"Them skeeters'll be the death of me yet," Kink Mitchell whimpered, as the canoe felt the current on her nose and leaped out from the bank.

"Cheer up, cheer up! We're about done," Hootchinoo Bill answered, with an attempted heartiness in his funeral tones that was ghastly. "We'll be in Forty Mile in forty minutes, and then— Cursed little devil!"

One hand had left his paddle and landed on the back of his neck with a sharp slap. He put a fresh daub of clay on the injured part, swearing sulphurously the while. Kink Mitchell was not in the least amused. He merely improved the opportunity by putting a thicker coating of clay on his own neck.

They crossed the Yukon to its west bank, shot downstream with easy stroke, and at the end of forty minutes swung in close to the left around the tail of an island. Forty Mile spread itself suddenly before them. Both men straightened their backs, and gazed at the sight. They gazed long and carefully, drifting with the current, and in their faces slowly gathering an expression of mingled surprise and consternation.

Not a thread of smoke was rising from the hundreds of log cabins. There was no sound of axes biting sharply into wood, of hammering and sawing. Neither dogs nor men loitered before the big store. No steamboats lay at the bank, no canoes, or scows, or poling boats. The river was as bare of craft as the town was of life.

"Kind of looks like Gabriel's tooted his little horn, and you an' me has turned up missing," remarked Hootchinoo Bill.

His remark was casual, as though there were nothing unusual about the occurrence. Kink Mitchell's reply was just as casual, as though he, too, were unaware of any strange perturbation of spirit.

"Looks as they was all Baptists, then, and took the boats to go by water," was his contribution.

"My ol' dad was a Baptist," Hootchinoo Bill supplemented. "An' he always did hold it was forty thousand miles nearer that way."

This was the end of their levity. They ran the canoe in and climbed the high earth bank. A feeling of awe descended upon them as they walked the deserted streets. The sunlight streamed placidly over the town. A gentle wind tapped the halyards against the flagpole before the closed doors of the Caledonia Dance Hall. Mosquitoes buzzed, robins sang, and moose birds tripped hungrily among the cabins; but there was no human life or sign of human life.

"I'm just dyin' for a drink," Hootchinoo Bill said, and unconsciously his voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

His partner nodded his head, loath to hear his own voice break the stillness. They trudged on in uneasy silence till surprised by an open door. Above this door, and stretching the width of the building, a rude sign announced the same as the Monte Carlo. But beside the door, hat over eyes, chair tilted back, a man sat sunning himself. He was an old man. Beard and hair were long and white and patriarchal.

"If it ain't ol' Jim Cummings, turned up like us, too late for resurrection," said Kink Mitchell.

"Most like he didn't hear Gabriel tootin'," was Hootchinoo Bill's suggestion.

"Hello, Jim! Wake up!" he shouted.

The old man unlimbered lamely, blinking his eyes and murmuring automatically: "What'll ye have, gents? What'll ye have?"

They followed him inside, and ranged up against the long bar where of yore half a dozen nimble barkeepers found little time to loaf. The great room, ordinarily a-roar with life, was gloomy and quiet as a tomb. There was no rattling of chips, no whirring of ivory balls. Roulette and faro tables were like gravestones under their canvas covers. No women's voices drifted merrily from the dance room behind. Ol' Jim Cummings wiped a glass with palsied hands, and Kink Mitchell scrawled his initials on the dust-covered bar.

"Where's the girls?" Hootchinoo Bill shouted, with affected geniality.

"Gone," was the ancient barkeeper's reply, in a voice thin and aged as himself, and as unsteady as his hand.

"Where's Bidwell and Barlow?"

"Gone."

"And Sweetwater Charley?"

"Gone."

"And his sister?"

"Gone, too."

"Your daughter, Sally, then, and her little kid?"

"Gone, all gone." The old man shook his head sadly, rummaging in an absent way among the dusty bottles.

"Great Sardanapalus! Where?" Kink Mitchell exploded, unable longer to restrain himself. "You don't say you've had the plague?"

"Why, ain't you heerd?" The old man chuckled quietly. "They-all's gone to Dawson."

"What-like is that?" Bill demanded. "A creek? or a bar? or a place?"

"Ain't never heerd of Dawson, eh?" The old man chuckled exasperatingly. "Why, Dawson's a town, a city; bigger'n Forty Mile! Yes, sir, bigger'n Forty Mile!"

"I've ben in this land seven year," Bill announced, emphatically, "an' I make free to say I never heard tell of the burg before. Hold on! Let's have some more of that whiskey. Your information's flabbergasted me, that it has. Now just whereabouts is this Dawson-place you was a-mentionin'?"

"On the big flat jest below the mouth of Klondike," Ol' Jim answered. "But where has you-all ben this summer?"

"Never you mind where we-all's ben," was Kink Mitchell's testy reply. "We-all's ben where the skeeters is that thick you've got to throw a stick into the air so as to see the sun and tell the time of day. Ain't I right, Bill?"

"Right you are," said Bill. "But speakin' of this Dawson-place, how like did it happen to be, Jim?"

"Ounce to the pan on a creek called Bonanza, an' they ain't got to bed rock yet."

"Who struck it?"

"Carmack."

At mention of the discoverer's name the partners stared at each other disgustedly. Then they winked with great solemnity.

"Siwash George," sniffed Hootchinoo Bill.

"That squawman," sneered Kink Mitchell.

"I wouldn't put on my moccasins to stampede after anything he'd ever find," said Bill.

"Same here," announced his partner. "A cuss that's too plumb lazy to fish his own salmon. That's why he took up with the Indians. S'pose that black brother-in-law of his—lemme see, Skookum Jim, eh?—s'pose he's in on it?"

The old barkeeper nodded. "Sure, an' what's more, all Forty Mile exceptin' me an' a few cripples."

"And drunks," added Kink Mitchell.

"No-sir-ee!" the old man shouted, emphatically.

"I bet you the drinks Honkins ain't in on it!" Hootchinoo Bill cried, with certitude.

Ol' Jim's face lighted up. "I takes you, Bill, an' you loses."

"However did that ol' soak budge out of Forty Mile?" Mitchell demanded.

"They ties him down, an' throws him in the bottom of a polin' boat," Ol' Jim explained. "Come right in here, they did, an' takes him out of that there chair there in the corner, an' three more drunks they finds under the piany. I tell you—alls the whole camp hits up the Yukon for Dawson jes' like Sam Scratch was after them—wimmen, children, babes in arms, the whole shebang. Bidwell comes to me, an' sez, sez he: 'Jim, I wants to you to keep tab on the Monte Carlo. I'm goin'.'"

"Where's Barlow?" sez I. 'Gone,' sez he, 'an' I'm a-followin' with a load of whiskey.' An' with that, never waitin' for me to decline, he makes a run for his boat, an' away he goes, polin' up-river like mad. So here I be, an' these is the first drinks I've passed out in three days."

The partners looked at each other.

"Gosh darn my buttons!" said Hoot-

chinoo Bill. "Seems like you and me, Kink, is the kind of folks always caught out with forks when it rains soup."

"Wouldn't it take the saleratus out your dough, now?" said Kink Mitchell. "A stampede of tin horns, drunks an' loafers."

"An' squawmen," added Bill. "Not a genooine miner in the whole caboodle."

"Genooine miners like you an' me, Kink," he went on, academically, "is all out an' sweatin' hard over Birch Creek way. Not a genooine miner in this whole crazy Dawson outfit, and I say right here, not a step do I budge for any Carmack strike. I've got to see the color of the dust first."

"Same here," Mitchell agreed. "Let's have another drink."

Having taken this resolution (and wetted it), they beached the canoe, transferred its contents to their cabin, and cooked dinner. But as the afternoon wore along they grew restive. They were men used to the silence of the great wilderness, but this grave-like silence of a town worried them. They caught themselves listening for familiar sounds—"waitin' for something to make a noise which ain't goin' to make a noise," as Bill put it. They strolled through the deserted streets to the Monte Carlo for more drinks, and wandered along the river bank to the steamer landing, where only water gurgled as the eddy filled and emptied, and an occasional salmon leaped flashing into the sun.

They sat down in the shade in front of the store, and talked with the consumptive storekeeper whose liability to hemorrhage accounted for his presence. Bill and Kink told him how they intended loafing in their cabin, and resting up after the hard summer's work. They told him with a certain insistence, which was half appeal for belief, half challenge for contradiction, how much they were going to enjoy their idleness. But the storekeeper was uninterested. He switched the conversation back to the strike on Klondike, and they could not keep him away from it. He could think of nothing else, talk of nothing else, till

Hootchinoo Bill rose up in anger and disgust.

"Gosh darn Dawson, say I!" he cried.

"Same here," said Kink Mitchell, with a brightening face. "One'd think something was doin' up there, 'stead of bein' a mere stampede of greenhorns an' tinhorns."

But a boat came into view from downstream. It was long and slim. It hugged the bank closely, and its three occupants, standing upright, propelled it against the swift current by means of long poles.

"Circle City outfit," said the storekeeper. "I was lookin' for 'em along by afternoon. Forty Mile had the start of them by a hundred and seventy miles. But gee! they ain't losin' any time!"

"We'll just sit here quiet-like, and watch 'em string by," Bill said, complacently.

As he spoke, another boat appeared in sight, followed after a brief interval by two others. By this time the first boat was abreast of the men on the bank. Its occupants did not cease poling while greetings were exchanged, and, though its progress was slow, half an hour saw it out of sight up-river.

Still they came from below, boat after boat, in endless procession. The uneasiness of Bill and Kink increased. They stole speculative, tentative glances at each other, and when their eyes met looked away in embarrassment. Finally, however, their eyes met, and neither looked away.

Kink opened his mouth to speak, but words failed him, and his mouth remained open, while he continued to gaze at his partner.

"Just what I was thinkin', Kink," said Bill.

They grinned sheepishly at each other, and by tacit consent started to walk away. Their pace quickened, and by the time they arrived at their cabin they were on the run.

"Can't lose no time with all that multitude a-rushin' by," Kink spluttered, as he jabbed the sour dough can into the bean pot with one hand and with the other gathered in the frying pan and coffee-pot.

"Should say not," gasped Bill, his head and shoulders buried in a clothes sack, wherein were stored winter socks and underwear.

"I say, Kink, don't forget the saleratus on the corner shelf back of the stove."

Half an hour later they were launching the canoe and loading up, while the storekeeper made jocular remarks about poor weak mortals and the contagiousness of "stampedin' fever." But when Bill and Kink thrust their long poles to bottom and started the canoe against the current, he called after them:

"Well, so long, and good luck! And don't forget to blaze a stake or two for me!"

They nodded their heads vigorously, and felt sorry for the poor wretch who remained perforce behind.

Kink and Bill were sweating hard. According to the revised northland scripture, the stampede is to the swift, the blazing of stakes to the strong, and the crown, in royalties, gathers to itself the fullness thereof. Kink and Bill were both swift and strong. They took the soggy trail at a long, swinging gait that broke the hearts of a couple of tenderfeet who tried to keep up with them. Behind, strung out between them and Dawson (where the boats were discarded, and land travel began), was the vanguard of the Circle City outfit. In the race from Forty Mile, the partners had passed every boat, winning from the leading boat by a length in the Dawson eddy, and leaving its occupants sadly behind the moment their feet struck the trail.

"Huh! couldn't see us for smoke," Hootchinoo Bill chuckled, flinging the stinging sweat from his brow, and glancing swiftly back along the way they had come.

Three men emerged from where the trail broke through the trees. Two followed close at their heels, and then a man and a woman shot into view.

"Come on, you Kink! Hit her up! Hit her up!"

Bill quickened his pace. Mitchell glanced back in more leisurely fashion.

"I declare, if they ain't lopin'!"

"And here's one that's loped himself out," said Bill, pointing to the side of the trail.

A man was lying on his back, panting, in the culminating stages of violent exhaustion. His face was ghastly, his eyes bloodshot and glazed, for all the world like a dying man.

"*Chechaquo!*" Kink Mitchell grunted, and it was the grunt of the old "sour dough" for the greenhorn, for the man who outfitted with "self-risin'" flour and used baking powder in his biscuits.

The partners, true to the old-timer custom, had intended to stake downstream from the strike, but when they saw claim "81 Below" blazed on a tree—which meant fully eight miles below Discovery—they changed their minds. The eight miles were covered in less than two hours. It was a killing pace over such rough trail, and they passed scores of exhausted men who had fallen by the wayside.

At Discovery little was to be learned of the upper creek. Carmack's Indian brother-in-law, Skookum Jim, had a hazy notion that the creek was staked as high as the thirties; but when Kink and Bill looked at the corner stakes of 79 Above, they threw their stampeding packs off their backs, and sat down to smoke. All their effort had been vain. Bonanza was staked from mouth to source—"Out of sight, and across the next divide," Bill complained that night as they fried their bacon and boiled their coffee over Carmack's fire at Discovery.

"Try that pup," Carmack suggested next morning.

"That pup" was a broad creek which flowed into Bonanza at 7 Above. The partners received his advice with the magnificent contempt of the sour dough for a squawman, and, instead, spent the day on Adam's Creek, another and more likely-looking tributary of Bonanza. But it was the old story over again—staked to the sky line.

For three days Carmack repeated his advice, and for three days they received

it contemptuously. But on the fourth day, there being nowhere else to go, they went up "that pup." They knew that it was practically unstaked, but they had no intention of staking. The trip was made more for the purpose of giving vent to their ill humor than for anything else. They had become quite cynical, skeptical. They jeered and scoffed at everything, and insulted every *chechaquo* they met along the way.

At number twenty-three the stakes ceased. The remainder of the creek was open to location.

"Moose pasture," sneered Kink Mitchell.

But Bill gravely paced off five hundred feet up the creek, and blazed the corner stakes. He had picked up the bottom of a candle box, and on the smooth side he wrote the notice for his center stake:

THIS MOOSE PASTURE IS RESERVED
FOR THE
SWEDES AND CHECHAQUOS.

BILL RADER.

Kink read it over with approval, saying:

"As them's my sentiments, I reckon I might as well subscribe."

So the name of Charles Mitchell was added to the notice; and many an old sour dough's face relaxed that day at sight of the handiwork of a kindred spirit.

"How's the pup?" Carmack inquired, when they strolled back into camp.

"To hell with pups!" was Hootchinoo Bill's reply. "Me and Kink's goin' a-lookin' for Too Much Gold when we get rested up."

Too Much Gold was the fabled creek of which all sour doughs dreamed, whereof it was said the gold was so thick, that, in order to wash it, gravel must first be shoveled into the sluice boxes. But the several days' rest preliminary to the quest for Too Much Gold, brought a slight change in their plan, inasmuch as it brought one Ans Handerson, a Swede.

Ans Handerson had been working for wages all summer at Miller Creek, over on the Sixty Mile; and, the summer done, had strayed up Bonanza like many another waif helplessly adrift on the gold tides that swept willy-nilly across the land. He was tall and lanky. His arms were long, like prehistoric man's, and his hands were like soup plates, twisted, and gnarled, and big-knuckled from toil. He was slow of utterance and movement, and his eyes, pale blue as his hair was pale yellow, seemed filled with an immortal dreaming, the stuff of which no man knew, and himself least of all. Perhaps this appearance of immortal dreaming was due to a supreme and vacuous innocence. At any rate, this was the valuation men of ordinary clay put upon him, and there was nothing extraordinary about the composition of Hootchinoo Bill and Kink Mitchell.

The partners had spent a day of visiting and gossip, and in the evening met in the temporary quarters of the Monte Carlo—a large tent where stampedeers rested their weary bones, and bad whiskey sold at a dollar a drink. Since the only money in circulation was dust, and since the house took the "down weight" on the scales, a drink cost something more than a dollar. Bill and Kink were not drinking, principally for the reason that their one and common sack was not strong enough to stand many excursions to the scales.

"Say, Bill, I've got a *chechaquo* on the string for a sack of flour," Mitchell announced, jubilantly.

Bill looked interested and pleased. Grub was scarce, and they were not over plentifully supplied for the quest after Too Much Gold.

"Flour's worth a dollar a pound," he answered. "How like do you calculate to get your finger on it?"

"Trade 'm a half interest in that there claim of our'n," Kink answered.

"What claim?" Bill was surprised. Then he remembered the reservation he had staked off for the Swedes, and said: "Oh!"

"I wouldn't be so clost about it, though," he added. "Give 'm the whole

thing while you're about it, in a right free-handed way."

Bill shook his head. "If I did he'd get clean scairt and prance off. I'm lettin' on as how the ground is believed to be valuable, an' that we're lettin' go half just because we're monstrous short on grub. After the dicker we can make him a present of the whole shebang."

"If somebody ain't disregarded our notice," Bill objected, though he was plainly pleased at prospect of exchanging the claim for a sack of flour.

"She ain't jumped," Kink assured him. "It's number twenty-four, and it stands. The *chechaquos* took it serious, and they begun stakin' where you left off. Staked clean over the divide, too. I was gassin' with one of them which has just got in with cramps in his legs."

It was then, and for the first time, that they heard the slow and groping utterance of Ans Handerson.

"Ay like the looks," he was saying to the barkeeper. "Ay tank ay gat a claim."

The partners winked at each other, and a few minutes later a surprised and grateful Swede was drinking bad whiskey with two hard-hearted strangers. But he was as hard-headed as they were hard-hearted. The sack made frequent journeys to the scales, followed solicitously each time by Kink Mitchell's eyes, and still Ans Handerson did not loosen up. In his pale blue eyes, as in summer seas, immortal dreams swam up and burned, but the swimming and the burning were due to the tales of gold and prospect-pans he heard of, rather than to the whiskey he slid so easily down his throat.

The partners were in despair, though they appeared boisterous and jovial of speech and action.

"Don't mind me, my friend," Hootchinoo Bill hiccupped, his hand upon Ans Handerson's shoulder. "Have another drink. We're just celebratin' Kink's birthday here. This is my pardner, Kink, Kink Mitchell. An' what might your name be?"

This learned, his hand descended resoundingly on Kink's back, and Kink

simulated clumsy self-consciousness in that he was for the time being the center of the rejoicing, while Ans Handerson looked pleased, and asked them to have a drink with him. It was the first and last time he treated, until the play changed, and his canny soul was aroused to unwonted prodigality. But he paid for the liquor from a fairly healthy-looking sack.

"Not less'n eight hundred in it," calculated the lynx-eyed Kink; and on the strength of it he took the first opportunity of a privy conversation with Bidwell, proprietor of the bad whiskey and the tent.

"Here's my sack, Bidwell," Kink said, with the intimacy and surety of one old-timer to another. "Just weigh fifty dollars into it for a day or so, more or less, and we'll be yours truly, Bill an' me."

Thereafter the journeys of the sack to the scales were more frequent, and the celebration of Kink's natal day waxed hilarious. He even essayed to sing the old-timer's classic, "The Juice of the Forbidden Fruit," but broke down, and drowned his embarrassment in another round of drinks. Even Bidwell honored him with a round or two on the house; and he and Bill were decently drunk by the time Ans Handerson's eyelids began to droop and his tongue gave promise of loosening.

Bill grew affectionate, then confidential. He told his troubles and hard luck to the barkeeper and the world in general, and to Ans Handerson in particular. He required no histrionic powers to act the part. The bad whiskey attended to that. He worked himself into a great sorrow for himself and Bill, and his tears were sincere, when he told how he and his partner were thinking of selling a half interest in good ground just because they were short of grub. Even Kink listened and believed.

Ans Handerson's eyes were shining unholily, as he asked: "How much you tank you take?"

Bill and Kink did not hear him, and he was compelled to repeat his query. They appeared reluctant. He grew keener. And he swayed back and for-

ward, holding on to the bar and listening with all his ears while they conferred together to one side, and wrangled as to whether they should or not, and disagreed in stage whispers over the price they should set.

"Two hundred and—hic!—fifty," Bill finally announced, "but we reckon as we won't sell."

"Which same is monstrous wise, if I might chip in my little say," seconded Bidwell.

"Yes, indeedy," added Kink. "We ain't in no charity business a-disgorgin' free an' generous to Swedes an' white-men."

"Ay tank we haf another drink," hic-coughed Ans Handerson, craftily changing the subject against a more propitious time.

And thereafter, to bring about that propitious time, his own sack began a seesaw between his hip pocket and the scales. Bill and Kink were coy, but they finally yielded to his blandishments. Whereupon he grew shy, and drew Bidwell to one side. He staggered exceedingly, and held on to Bidwell for support, as he asked:

"They ban all right, them men, you tank so?"

"Sure," Bidwell answered, heartily. "Know 'em for years. Old sour doughs. When they sell a claim they sell a claim. They ain't no air dealers."

"Ay tank ay buy," Ans Handerson announced, tottering back to the two men.

But by now he was dreaming deeply, and he proclaimed that he would have the whole claim or nothing. This was the cause of great pain to Hootchinoo Bill. He orated grandly against the "hawg-ishness" of *chechaquos* and Swedes, albeit he dozed between periods, his voice dying away to a gurgle and his head sinking forward on his breast. But whenever aroused by a nudge from Kink or Bidwell he never failed to explode another volley of abuse and insult.

Ans Handerson was calm under it all. Each insult added to the value of the claim. Such unamiable reluctance to sell advertised but one thing to him,

and he was aware of a great relief when Hootchinoo Bill sank snoring to the floor, and he was free to turn his attention to his less intractable partner.

Kink Mitchell was persuadable, though a poor mathematician. He wept dolefully, but was willing to sell a half interest for two hundred and fifty dollars, or the whole claim for seven hundred and fifty. Ans Handerson and Bidwell labored to clear away his erroneous ideas concerning fractions, but their labor was vain. He spilled tears and regrets all over the bar and on their shoulders, which tears, however, did not wash away his opinion that if one-half was worth two hundred and fifty, two halves were worth three times as much.

In the end—and even Bidwell retained no more than hazy recollections of how the night terminated—a bill of sale was drawn up, wherein Bill Rader and Charles Mitchell yielded up all right and title to the claim known as 24 Eldorado, the same being the name the creek had received from some optimistic *chechaquo*.

When Kink had signed, it took the united efforts of the three to arouse Bill. Pen in hand, he swayed long over the document; and, each time he rocked back and forth, in Ans Handerson's eyes flashed and faded a wondrous golden vision. When the precious signature was at last appended and the dust paid over, he breathed a great sigh, and sank to sleep under a table, where he dreamed immortally until morning.

But the day was chill and gray. He felt badly. His first act, unconscious and automatic, was to feel for his sack. Its lightness startled him. Then, slowly, memories of the night thronged into his brain. Rough voices disturbed him. He opened his eyes, and peered out from under the table. A couple of early risers, or, rather, men who had been out on trail all night, were vociferating their opinions concerning the utter and loathable worthlessness of Eldorado Creek. He grew frightened, felt in his pocket, and found the deed to 24 Eldorado.

Ten minutes later Hootchinoo Bill

and Kink Mitchell were aroused from their blankets by a wild-eyed Swede, who strove to force upon them an ink-scribbled and very blotchy piece of paper.

"Ay tank-ay take my money back," he gibbered. "Ay tank ay take my money back."

Tears were in his eyes and throat. They ran down his cheeks as he knelt before them, and pleaded and implored. But Bill and Kink did not laugh. They might have been harder hearted.

"First time I ever hear a man squeal over a minin' deal," Bill said. "An' I make free to say 'tis too unusual for me to savve."

"Same here," Kink Mitchell remarked. "Minin' deals is like horse tradin'."

They were honest in their wonderment. They could not conceive of themselves raising a wail over a business transaction, so they could not understand it in another man.

"The poor, ornery *chechaquo*," murmured Hootchinoo Bill, as they watched the sorrowing Swede disappear up the trail.

"But this ain't Too Much Gold," Kink Mitchell said, cheerfully.

And ere the day was out they purchased flour and bacon at exorbitant prices with Ans Handerson's dust, and crossed over the divide in the direction of the creeks which lie between Klondike and Indian River.

Three months later they came back over the divide in the midst of a snow-storm, and dropped down the trail to 24 Eldorado. It merely chanced that the trail led them that way. They were not looking for the claim. Nor could they see much through the driving white till they set foot upon the claim itself. And then the air lightened, and they beheld a dump, capped by a windlass which a man was turning. They saw him draw a bucket of gravel from the hole, and tilt it on the edge of the dump. Likewise they saw another man, strangely familiar, filling a pan with the fresh gravel. His hands were large; his hair was pale yellow. But before they reached him, he turned with the pan and fled toward a cabin.

He wore no hat, and the snow falling down his neck accounted for his haste. Bill and Kink ran after him, and came upon him in the cabin, kneeling by the stove, and washing the pan of gravel in a tub of water.

He was too deeply engaged to notice more than that somebody had entered the cabin. They stood at his shoulder and looked on. He imparted to the pan a deft circular motion, pausing once or twice to rake out the larger particles of gravel with his fingers. The water was muddy, and with the pan buried in it they could see nothing of its contents. Suddenly he lifted the pan clear, and sent the water out of it with a flirt. A mass of yellow, like butter in a churn, showed across the bottom.

Hootchinoo Bill swallowed. Never

in his life had he dreamed of so rich a test pan.

"Kind of thick, my friend," he said, huskily. "How much might you reckon that-all to be?"

Ans Handerson did not look up, as he replied:

"Ay tank fafty ounces."

"You must be scrumptious rich, then, eh?"

Still Ans Handerson kept his head down, absorbed in putting in the fine touches which wash out the last particles of dross, though he answered:

"Ay tank ay ban worth five hundred t'ousand dollar."

"Gosh!" said Hootchinoo Bill; and he said it reverently.

"Yes, Bill, gosh!" said Kink Mitchell; and they went out softly, and closed the door.



TO A GIBSON GIRL

SIMULATING ice and snow;
Proud, impassive, haughty, cold,
From your satin-slipped toe
To each tress of wayward gold!

Pouting-lipped complexity;
Daphné, gay in crêpe-de-chine;
Softer-souled Euryalé
Sedately gowned in étamine!

Child of old Deucalion,
Mocked by all this modern pomp;
Aphrodité, full of fun;
Juno, aching for a romp!

Dreaming-eyed, unmoved, austere;
Towering queen of dignity
To a hoodwinked world, my dear,
But impostor unto me!

For I know you—I alone—
Laughing, wayward child of sun,
And impulsive, overgrown
Girl and angel, all in one!

JOHN ARBUTHNOTT.

THE FIRST MILESTONE

By Alice Duer Miller

Author of "The Modern Obstacle," Etc.

THERE could be no question that Aminta was a perfectly ordinary doll. Her counterpart, clad in a mosquito-netting chemise and a string of red coral beads, could be seen in the window of any toy shop. She had blue eyes, pink cheeks, flaxen hair—possessions, which, though they may go far toward the attainment of beauty by a human being, are really of very little account in a doll.

It was not, therefore, for her personal appearance that she was beloved by her owner—Marjorie, aged seven. A deeper bond of sympathy existed between them. Aminta was of a size that fitted so confidently into the crook of an arm, of a nature so soothing when, waking in the night, one could discern, unmistakably, a black-robed giant behind the wardrobe. She listened with so unwavering an attention when on tedious railway journeys, her restless mistress discoursed of the dragons and dwarfs that peopled the quick-passing country.

Every one who knows anything of the subject at all knows that there are two ways of playing—two methods, which correspond not inaptly to romanticism and realism in fiction. The first is bound by no considerations of time and space. Your doll may be a princess of Arabia in the morning, and a baby with the measles in the afternoon. But by the second method no such impossibilities are permitted. Your doll must be washed and dressed, even as you yourself are cared for, and if you neglect to give her her breakfast, you have the remorseful consciousness that she has gone hungry. She goes out

when you do, studies when you are similarly annoyed, and, above all, goes to bed when you go to bed. Need it be said that this responsible and lifelike plan was the only one which the seriousness of Aminta's disposition made it possible for Marjorie to adopt?

Aminta had come on Christmas day, and now for almost a year had she and Marjorie shared each other's joys and sorrows. They had watched the snow melt, and discovered with shrill-voiced excitement the coming of the first violets. They had seen the days grow long with a delight which custom had not staled for either. They had together collected autumn leaves and horse chestnuts—rare specimens that no one else seemed capable of appreciating. They had, in short, completed the vast cycle of a year in each other's society, and now Christmas was again at hand. It was Christmas eve, and as yet Aminta felt no presage of evil!

In the gray of the morning she was aroused from what had the appearance of sound slumber by Marjorie, who was panting to examine their stockings, which hung side by side. Afterward, Marjorie liked to think that the occasion had been entirely satisfactory to both. When this excitement was over and they returned to bed, she was able to beguile for Aminta the long hours before breakfast by a history of thrilling interest, in which the chief characters were Santa Claus and a mermaid—a history well fitted to be the last in a long series.

Very punctually—for more presents were always to be found at the breakfast table—did Marjorie enter the din-

ing-room, bearing in her arms Aminta, who, in defiance of convention, was wearing a pair of purple gloves, which the forethought of Santa Claus had bestowed in her stocking. They entered together, but suddenly Aminta was dropped face downward upon the morning paper, and Marjorie, with a cry, ran to her chair, wherein was seated a doll whose beauty surpassed all probabilities, all dreams. It was not only that she was beautiful—many dolls are that—but a certain measure of art had been expended in her composition. She was of the brunette type, glowing and alluring; so slight, too, that all others seemed chunky beside her. And to these charms, she added that of maturity, for she was a grown-up doll. It is scarcely necessary to add that her wardrobe, which she brought with her, was as complete as it was dazzling—velvet and fur for winter wear, muslins and leghorns for summer, a low neck white satin, and a blue brocade, of a pattern strangely similar to one once worn by Marjorie's mamma.

Of course it was not Aminta's fault that she had only one white petticoat, and had to go to bed on the rare occasions when this was washed; but most unjustly, it seemed distinctly a virtue in Celestine (no English name would have fitted so mysteriously lovely a creature) that she should have three at her disposal.

Marjorie ate little breakfast, and Aminta none at all, for the excellent reason that she was offered none. The omission was rectified later, when a short *rapprochement* took place. Aminta was set side by side with Celestine while the trousseau of the latter was exhibited, but the experiment was not a success. Aminta doubtless was aware that she looked dumpty and unlikely, owing to the close proximity of perfection, and taking not the slightest interest in dress, she declined to manifest any, an indifference that marked the first separation between herself and Marjorie.

After this followed for Marjorie a brief period of intoxication. Throughout the day, the thought of Celestine

shone like a beacon, obscured but never hidden by the necessary interventions of food and study. At night she struggled against sleep, which deprived her of the knowledge of her happiness. In the morning she awoke, not reluctantly, but gladly, vivified by the flood of sunshine that the possession of Celestine poured into her conscious mind.

Then, too, there was the obvious necessity that all externals should be re-adjusted to this new element. What did Celestine think of the bronze lion in the drawing-room? What about the snow on the fir trees? Had icicles indeed existed before this, if Celestine had never enjoyed their iridescence?

In all this, however, Aminta was not wholly forgotten. She was still washed, dressed and fed at the appointed hours, but hastily and usually in silence. Often, in the night, however, pangs of remorse, keen and physical, would seize Marjorie, and she would get up and patter across to Aminta's bed, and coddle and caress her, and tell her she was still loved, and that things would be different the next day, but no change came.

At length, the situation was relieved in a somewhat tragic manner, for one evening at bedtime Aminta's head quietly rolled from her body. The accident, which has a somewhat serious sound, was not of great consequence. It had occurred so many times before that Marjorie's mother, moved by pity at her daughter's oft-recurring bereavement, had thoroughly acquired the art of replacing the missing member within a few hours of the catastrophe. But now, strange to say, her services were not called for. Day after day, Marjorie meant to request them, but each day she became more absorbed by Celestine. At the end of the week the nursery was cleaned, and the nurse put Aminta away on a shelf in the closet, and with this the last chance of reconstruction seemed to be gone.

Thus did Marjorie yield herself unreservedly to the charm. In her relation with Celestine there was none of the good-comradeship which Aminta had called forth. On the contrary, she felt a constant dread, spurring her to ef-

fort, that Celestine would find wearisome any stories but the best. She had a consciousness that it would be presumption to turn for consolation over small trials and illogical fears to a creature who was herself so far removed from such commonplace annoyances. Led by true love she abandoned these weak desires for dependence and gave herself up to the delight of helping Celestine to enjoy life, an occupation which for a month absorbed her time wholly and satisfactorily.

Then the inevitable reaction came. One morning, Marjorie awoke, and staring at the ray of sunshine, glaring on the brass bedpost, she realized fully that she had been false, and was tortured by the torture she had inflicted. She arose hastily, to make what reparation the unaltered facts of the case would allow, but no Aminta was forthcoming. As the search became more frenzied, the nurse awoke and explained with a brutality born of sleepiness that Aminta had been mended and given away the week before to "a little girl who didn't get a new doll every Christmas."

The next instant Marjorie's mamma

opened her eyes to find her daughter sitting upon her chest, already in the midst of an explanation which tears were rendering almost unintelligible.

"But, darling," said her mother, not wholly rising to the sudden demand made upon her, "you had not played with her for a month; you had not even had her mended. I could not suppose you wanted her."

At this Marjorie's sobs became convulsive, but making a supreme effort she said:

"That is just it! I did not want her. I did not want to have to play with her, instead of Celestine, but she must know, and I can't bear to think how she must feel, how unhappy she is."

The answer to this was simple. Can wood and stone feel? Can china and composition? The case was an easy one to expound, and Marjorie's mother put it strongly. She was rewarded by hearing her daughter's sobs cease. Evidently it was not worth while to grieve. Aminta felt neither joy nor sorrow—had never felt either. But, then, ah! what about Celestine?

At this price did Marjorie purchase consolation.



IN A STUDIO

AMONG the pictures, watchful-eyed,
Slim, slanting sunbeams dart.
O word unsaid, O fate untried—
We sit and talk of "art."

Her hair is all a pale gold mist,
Her sweet, curved lips apart—
O kisses that shall ne'er be kissed—
We sit and talk of "art."

And still I watch the small ring shine
That says he holds her heart.
O love! But never love of mine!
'Tis safe to talk of "art!"

ESTHER CHAMBERLAIN.

ANDREW'S LEADING LADY

By James Forbes

Author of "The Jealous Mrs. Jeffries," "For Two or For Four," Etc.

"I BEG pardon, miss, but when does the next train leave?"

"North or South?"

"Search me."

"Sir!"

"I beg pardon—but—really, I don't know which is which."

"Where did you come from?"

"I got off the train that's pulling out."

"Where do you wish to go?"

"Back."

"How far?"

"Search——"

"I am not a customs' officer."

"Are you the ticket agent?"

"No, the telegraph operator."

"Can you sell me a ticket?"

"Yes, if you can decide on your destination."

"I must have come from somewhere."

"Presumably. You're a stranger to me."

"See here, my good girl——"

"I am not *your* good girl."

"I beg pardon, but—you see, I am lost."

"How interesting! Excuse me—stand to one side, please. How do you do, Mrs. Mills? Merry Christmas! The fare to Bird-in-Hand? One seventy-six. Going over next week? Gave you your fare for a Christmas box. Sweet of Mr. Mills. Yes, it is just as well to have your ticket beforehand. . . . No, father is not quite so well. Yes, it does make the day a little sad for us. . . . Oh, I wouldn't check my trunk to-morrow. You would have to pay storage at the other end. Seems small of a big railway like this. You should work for them to find out just how mean a cor-

poration can be. . . . Which man? Oh, over by the stove. A friend of mine? I never saw him before in my life. Drummer? I wouldn't be surprised. I hope you have a pleasant time at the tree this afternoon. No. I can't come. Some one has to watch the key. Good-by!"

"I beg pardon, miss, but——"

"Have you decided?"

"Don't you understand. I am L-O-S-T—lost."

"Not insane?"

"You see, I overslept."

"Oh, you're not awake."

"I am a comedian."

"How funny!"

"Funny enough to draw a salary. Let me explain. It's rather difficult."

"Being a comedian? Or being lost?"

"Both. It's a long story——"

"This is my busy day."

"I dislike to see you standing. Couldn't I come in there?"

"You could."

"But you won't invite me."

"It's against the rules."

"Then I am compelled to remain in cold storage."

"I forgot—I didn't expect much travel on Christmas day, so I only built a fire in here."

"You didn't build that!"

"What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing, except its distance."

"Would you report me at headquarters if I allowed you to freeze?"

"No. I would stand here with unutterable pathos writ large on my face."

"Like that?"

"Doesn't it move you?"

"To laughter—you funny man—you

may come in, for you have hours to wait."

"Horrors!"

"How uncomplimentary!"

"I beg your pardon—but——"

"That's the fourth time——"

"I know—but peace and good-will toward all men——"

"You were saying——"

"You must think me stupid——"

"I didn't hear you mention it."

"But you do think me stupid."

"How could I?"

"I have strayed from the fold."

"You look sheepish."

"I wouldn't have believed it of you. You appear to be a warm-hearted girl who might be kind to a stray——"

"Why do you interrupt yourself? Please arrive. What fold?"

"Lost in Liverpool." That's the name of the place."

"Oh!"

"We have been touring the oil circuit. Likewise the coal beds. Our advance man would make Columbus look like car fare. He is the original discoverer of places not on the map. We made a jump after the performance last night. I overslept. I don't see how I did, when I recall the upholstery of the seat. I woke up, and 'All but me had fled.' Where am I at?"

"Conemaugh."

"Holy mackerel, don't tell me I am in Ireland!"

"No. Pennsylvania."

"It's too many miles from old Broadway. It's too far to venture for the coin——"

"The rest of the troupe ran away, and left you. Where is your show to-night?"

"I don't know. Some one-night stand along the turnpike. I've played so many of them since I left New York that I've lost count. I simply follow——"

"The man from Cook's, I suppose."

"No; the treasurer."

"What blind faith!"

"Not at all. He's the man to stay close to in this business."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Go back. Make inquiries at each station until I discover where I belong."

"I have a better scheme than that."

"I am open for brilliant suggestions."

"I'll wire along the line, and locate the company."

"Great idea. My dear girl——"

"I am not *your* dear girl——"

"I beg pardon, but—I meant excuse me—you're a trump."

"I am only doing my duty."

"Oh!"

"My position demands that I return to their destination all articles wrongly forwarded."

"When you find them, just tell them that you saw me."

"Me' is a trifle vague."

"Tommy Rogers, F. F."

"Favorite Funmaker?"

"No. Foolish Face."

"I don't think so at all."

"Thanks. They do. You see my good—operator. Ah! I fooled you that time. They have traveled with me."

"Is this sort of thing frequent?"

"I wish it were. I'd be willing to get lost as many as——"

"Hush! I have Tyrone on the wire."

"You're quite sure I am not in Ireland?"

"You don't belong in Tyrone."

"No. I am an American."

"It wouldn't be Harrisburg?"

"Oh, no. Harrisburg's a city. Try that place your friend Mrs. Mills mentioned. Bird-in-Hand sounds like a place likely to appeal to our advance man."

"Bird-in-Hand is a flag station."

"Try it. We've done the water tanks."

"Maybe it's the next town, Lancaster."

"All one-night stands look alike to me."

"Yes, it is Lancaster—and your manager is in the ticket office."

"Tell him that he has all my love—and all my money."

"Lancaster says he's been wiring all along the line, and that he's wild——"

"Twenty-five cents a wire would annoy Rosey."

"He's describing you."

"What are you laughing at?"

"It's so funny."

"Do I fit it?"

"Yes. That's why it's so funny."

"Don't you dare identify me."

"I have."

"Is it Rosenberg himself?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"Lancaster says he can't repeat it to a lady. But the gist of it is to forward you by the first train, properly tagged."

"I'll punch his fat head. Tagged! What are you writing?"

"The directions. 'Call me at Lancaster.' There, you've kicked over the coal hod."

"Clumsy of me—I stumbled. Tagged!"

"Don't be angry. You make it so difficult for me. 'Orders is orders.' Shall I pin it on? Or would you prefer it tied about your neck?"

"I may be a prize package, but you can't express me."

"But, if you are mislaid again, I will be held responsible."

"That was charming of you. At what figure do you estimate my face value?"

"Four hundred dollars."

"My face is my fortune, ma'am," he said.

"I am quoting Rosenberg's valuation."

"Incautious Rosey! I will strike him for a raise."

"He said he would cheerfully give that amount to 'lay eyes on your mug'—I think that was his expression."

"There must be a good advance sale in Lancaster."

"Are you really worth that to him?"

"He might lead an innocent public to think so. But my private emolument is minus one of those ciphers."

"Why, I thought all actors had yachts and everything."

"Not 'Lost in Liverpool' actors."

"Is it a bad play?"

"It's so bad the management is making a fortune out of it."

"Do all bad plays make money?"

"If they are superlatively worse."

"And bad actors don't."

"You'll have to return me to Lancaster C. O. D. By the way, speaking of money—rather the lack of it—where can I get a combination breakfast?—wait a moment—ten, twenty, thirty— Yes, it will have to be a number one combination breakfast and a five-cent cigar."

"Oh, my, haven't you breakfasted? You must be starved, and there are no restaurants here. There is the Elite Hotel, but——"

"Why tremble for me? The village inns and I are old acquaintances. There have I learned to bear and forbear; to swear and forswear."

"The drummers go on dreadfully about it."

"Then it is not for Tommy Rogers. I am not going to insult my palate by lowering it below that of a drummer's."

"What will you do?"

"Try the tramp's recipe."

"Did you ever know a real tramp?"

"Several have begged my acquaintance."

"What was the recipe?"

"You take several cupfuls of water. Mix thoroughly in your digestive apparatus. Then let it settle. He argued that only 'res'less' people grew hungry."

"Don't be ridiculous. There's the lunch counter!"

"Where?"

"In the next room."

"Will you join me? I'll share the eggs and the rolls. And—yes—we can have two cups of coffee."

"What about the cigar?"

"I don't need it, really."

"Do you think I am going to spend half a day with a man who craves tobacco?"

"Then you are not going to desert me to partake of Christmas plum pudding."

"Some one must be on duty. Dad's too ill to relieve me."

"I am so glad—I mean I am so sorry. No. I mean— Wait a moment. I regret your father's illness, but I am grateful for your society. Gosh! Let us pretend that it's Easter, and celebrate with eggs instead of plum pudding."

"Oh, I forgot. The lunch counter is closed to-day."

"Heartless maiden! I had tasted those eggs."

"I have some plum pudding in my lunch basket. We'll have a party. Miss Flora Maitland requests the pleasure of Mr. Thomas Rogers F. F.'s company at luncheon, now."

"Mr. Thomas Rogers, F. O. G."

"F. O. G.?"

"Favored of the gods hastens to accept Miss Flora—sweet name, Flora—"

"Do you think so?"

"Miss Flora Maitland's kind invitation to luncheon this day of our Lord, December twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and—three cheers for Santa Claus."

"Shall we heat the turkey?"

"Eat the turkey! I should be delighted."

"No, no; warm it up."

"Beggars should not be finicky."

"You are my guest."

"Then I demand turkey piping hot. How are you going to do it?"

"Over the coals, F. F. Clear away those books and close the ticket window. Give me that tin thing. Not the dipper. The little pan underneath the table."

"It's just like light housekeeping"

"Don't let it burn, while I set the table."

"I'll be good."

"What will you have in your coffee?"

"Everything. You know, you're very clever."

"I didn't cook the luncheon."

"That's a small matter. You make it look so appetizing."

"The holly sprigs do that. Aren't you glad I trimmed the office? Makes it look so Santa Clausey."

"Why don't they ever have Christmas picnics?"

"Why don't you introduce them?"

"Because December twenty-fifth is also the actors' busy day."

"No leisure to enjoy plum pudding?"

"No desire to enjoy anything."

"Why?"

"No desired one to enjoy anything with?"

"Really?"

"The joyous Yuletide means an extra performance without extra pay, as a sort of Christmas donation to the managerial stocking."

"Didn't Mr. Rosenberg hang his up this year?"

"It isn't advisable to give more than one performance of 'Lost in Liverpool' anywhere. The first comers might not spread glad tidings of great enjoyment."

"Then your companions are having a holiday to-day. Probably you are missing a jolly celebration."

"I wouldn't exchange."

"To whom were you saying pretty things last Christmas?"

"My landlady."

"I hope they pleased her, Mr. Rogers."

"They won my point, Miss Maitland."

"You must be very clever at compliments."

"It does require considerable ingenuity and originality to impress a landlady. Don't you think so?"

"I've never impressed a landlady."

"Lucky young woman!"

"What was your point? More turkey?"

"More time on my bill."

"Oh, I didn't understand. Forgive my flippancy. It must be terrible to be—"

"Broke on Christmas day. Well, I've hovered around the edge of the hell of poverty often. I touched bottom that day—I have shocked you."

"No. Happiness never appears to be so universal, nor so necessary. Won't you have a cigar? Don't be afraid. Father smokes them, and he's a crank about tobacco."

"Thank you. You are sure it won't annoy you?"

"Certainly not. Have a drop more coffee."

"Thank you. I had been through an awful siege of bad luck. The season started well; good part, good salary. The play failed. Then it seemed impossible to get another engagement. Too tall for one part; too short for another; too late for a third. I had spent all my

savings on wardrobe for the failure. I wouldn't ask my family because they were not in sympathy with my stage career."

"It's a way families have."

"You have encountered it?"

"Yes. It's so incomprehensible to me. If a girl has a voice, father, mother and big brother will slave from morning till night, year in and year out, that daughter may make Nordica look to her laurels. Mention 'play-acting,' and they place her in solitary confinement on a bread and water diet until she is cured of her 'fool nonsense.'"

"Whose wrongs are you championing? What Duse has been blighted in her youth?"

"It's unkind of you to sneer at me."

"You don't mean that *you*—oh! my dear Miss Maitland!"

"I warn you. I cannot be discouraged. I am determined to go on the stage."

"How did you become infected with the microbe?"

"I have always recited at the entertainments for the church fund."

"Oh, Charity, what sins are committed in thy name!"

"You are perfectly horrid, Mr. Rogers. Every one says there's the making of an actress in me."

"There is the instinct of an actress in every woman. Fortunately many of them leave it undeveloped."

"Even my women friends say that I show promise."

"There should be a law against it."

"What? Flattery?"

"No; amateur elocution bouts."

"It's the way all the great stars have begun."

"You've been filling that pretty head of yours with those illustrated fables, 'How I Raised the Church Debt and Went on the Stage.' Very pretty, but —"

"You seem to be a doubting Thomas Rogers."

"Why drag in the church? It is responsible for enough exploited vanity in its publicity-loving ministers."

"Are you beating about the bush?

Do you want to deliver the usual lecture on morals?"

"Morals have nothing to do with the case. They are a matter of the girl, more than her surroundings."

"Then your subject is to be temptation."

"A village offers as many opportunities for the shattering of the Seventh Commandment as a city."

"Why warn me against adopting your own profession?"

"I am not waving any bright-red danger signals. I am not trying to shoo you off the track. Only I would wish you to be sure that you must make the race, and that you realize the real value of the prize—should you win it."

"You are a dismal croaker, sitting there grave as an owl."

"It's a dismal problem."

"I'll warrant you took the step lightly enough."

"There was no one to counsel me to look before I made the leap."

"It's always so. Everybody stretches out a hand to pull you away from what you would most like to do. It's so easy to give advice."

"It's bitter work crushing enthusiasm."

"You have not squelched my desire."

"Do you want to be great?"

"I want to be somebody."

"Why not be a big frog in this quiet little pond?"

"Because my father and his father before him were little frogs, and you can't swim out of your corner of the pool. The big frogs won't allow it. Besides, I have had nineteen years of quiet—I want to see something, do something, be something. One day I heard a traveler say he would rather see a new village every day than live in the largest city of the world all his life."

"Too bad he isn't with 'Lost in Liverpool.'"

"I felt own sister to that man."

"Oh, you crave excitement!"

"Isn't it possible for a country girl to be ambitious?"

"Yes. There's Mary McLane."

"You refuse to consider me seriously."

"Don't be angry, little woman. And you need not gaze down the track. My train is not due for half an hour. If I have hurt you grievously, it's a poor return for a hospitality so gracious that its flavor will mingle with every other Christmas day of my life. Forgive me. I but tried to discern whether you were possessed by ambition or unrest."

"This ticking, ticking, never-ending ticking of the key. It seems sometimes as though I must cry out or go mad."

"Nerves, Miss Maitland. Nerves."

"You have not sat here day after day—"

"With my finger on a bit of wire that apprises me of all the events of the great world out there—"

"Yes—and that number five is fifty minutes late. I hate this—all this—the never-ending sameness."

"Life is largely monotony; pleasant and unpleasant."

"How can you say that? Think of *your* life in contrast to *mine*."

"The contrast is there."

"The places you see."

"Yes, last year I visited one hundred and fourteen in nineteen weeks."

"The people you meet."

"Hotel clerks, stage hands, drummers and actors."

"I am not a very good audience. You are trying to be funny, but I can't laugh."

"There is nothing singular about that. What's one man's fun is another man's sorrow."

"You purposely avoid the brighter side. The dignified social position. I've read that some actresses associate with the Four Hundred of New York. The distinguished friendships you make. The applause of the public, the pride of your family—"

"True. You see, I keep forgetting that you are going to be great. Are you anticipating any other rewards?"

"Fame, wealth, happiness; some have all three."

"Which two would content you?"

"The first and last."

"If the choice were made between these."

"Of course, one must have happiness."

"But real happiness comes only with love."

"You use Andrew's argument."

"So, there is an Andrew?"

"Yes, a very dear Andrew—I don't see why I should not tell you. We are engaged."

"Give him my congratulations."

"I am quite as deserving of them."

"Isn't it a little early in the game to take issue with Andrew about what constitutes happiness? Don't bother about the ingredients. Enjoy them as a whole."

"It's the purchase price we quarrel over."

"All the world's well lost for love."

"It's pride that bars the way."

"Send that mischief-maker to the right-about."

"How can I marry a man whose family consider a telegraph operator as utterly unworthy of their son?"

"But, my dear girl, you are not marrying Andrew's family."

"Happiness at the cost of eternal patronage; no, thank you."

"Don't subject yourself to it. Conemaugh hasn't a corner on joy."

"Run away from those women who have ignored me all my life? I see myself. Why, they didn't know I was in the same planet until Andrew discovered—"

"That you were the earth, and the gladness thereof; the sun, moon and stars—the whole solar system, as far as he, personally, was concerned."

"What do you imagine those women said of me?"

"Mere man has limited powers of imagination where the feminine tongue is concerned. I might easily conjecture what they left unsaid."

"Believe me, you do Andrew's sisters an injustice. They have talked reams and insinuated volumes. Virtues have I none."

"Ladies addicted to single-blessedness, I presume. It's unfortunate that you are young and pretty. It's hard to forgive."

"I had desiginingly entangled their

brother—I wouldn't marry the best man alive—Andrew is—and incur that sort of suspicion. It would embitter our whole lives. My dear old dad is as good as theirs any day. Wait until I come back."

"Great?"

"They will be very much flattered to have Andrew——"

"Marry an actress?"

"A celebrity. I'll do a little of the condescending——"

"Why are you so confident of success on the stage?"

"It's so easy."

"Holy mackerel! This is incredible."

"They have all sprung from nothing. Why not I? Success is only a matter of intelligence."

"Not in acting."

"You declared only a moment ago that every woman had the instinct of an actress. Don't tell me that I, alone, have but that of a telegraph operator. Tell me. What, then, are the essentials for success on the stage?"

"I refer you to the illustrated weeklies. It's a favorite topic. Tell me, have you never stopped to figure the consequences of a failure?"

"I will not fail. I have too much at stake."

"That slogan has been on all our lips as we entered the battleground."

"Some have emerged chanting the song of victory."

"But we never know at what cost. Now, I have paid dearly for the prize of mediocrity——"

"Mediocrity is preferable to nothingness."

"My dear Miss Maitland, the dead level of commonplace achievement brings its compensation in many walks of life. But a mediocre actor—if he have the instinct for greatness—lives a tragedy of baffled ambition, humiliated vanity and dead hopes."

"Is that really true?"

"Stern facts—although you would not glean them from the illustrated weeklies."

"Is that your story?"

"It's the end of it."

"May I know the beginning?"

"I was a lawyer of the 'rising' kind, with some ability to grasp the human-interest phase of a case, and was usually effective with a jury. My eloquence was hampered with a slight impediment in my speech. I decided to overcome it. I studied elocution, among other things, Shakespeare. I fell in love with my own voice, and saw myself a second Booth. That delusion cost me fortune, fame and happiness."

"Your family never forgave you?"

"Oh, yes; they made the best of a bad bargain——"

"Was there any one like—like Andrew?"

"Yes."

"And you never went back?"

"Not chanting a song of victory."

"How could you go at all?"

"We played the town. I couldn't resign as I needed the engagement. I believe that I drew rather well."

"Did she see you?"

"No, I was spared that. It's quite a drop from even an amateur *Hamlet* to a comedy tramp in melodrama. Her husband sent me a complimentary note about my performance."

"She had not waited."

"For five years. It wasn't her fault. I simply couldn't earn enough for both of us. I couldn't ask her to share the agonizing uncertainties. I hoped—she prayed, I believe—for the New York chance that would send my salary skyward. It came, but I was among the acceptable supporting company. That was bitter reading."

"But you hadn't failed?"

"I hadn't made good. I tried to go back to the law, but I had lost my clients. I offered my services to firms that had once made me flattering propositions. But I had lost caste. I had chosen to be an actor, and an actor I must remain. So I drifted back to the only avenue of livelihood open to me. Then I released her. I couldn't offer the being I loved a failure. Could you?"

"Oh, my God, no! I want Andrew to be proud of me."

"Andrew or Andrew's family?"

"Only Andrew."

"Good. There's a chance for you."	"Andrew's."
"How?"	"I don't understand."
"Accept an engagement."	"Think it over. Here's my train!
"You have frightened me."	Any terms you arrange will be satis-
"Love will win success where pride	factory to me— Good-by. God bless
might fail."	you—"
"You will help me?"	"God bless you."
"Yes; I'll find you a position as a	"Oh, you mustn't cry. There's no
leading lady."	need for worry—you're going to be
"Whose?"	great in the part."



"CUDDLIN'TOWN"

SAY, have you been to Cuddlin'town—
 To Cuddlin'town—to Cuddlin'town?
 Where fairies frolic up an' down
 With merry elves so small an' brown,
 An' birdies sing
 Jes' like it's spring?
 It's dre'fful sweet in Cuddlin'town!

I take my doll to Cuddlin'town—
 To Cuddlin'town—to Cuddlin'town.
 It's awful nice to snuggle down!
 When we's bofe tired from rompin' roun'
 We always know
 It's time to go
 An' take a trip to Cuddlin'town!

I'm never 'fraid in Cuddlin'town—
 In Cuddlin'town—in Cuddlin'town!
 I'm brave when I go trav'lin' roun'
 'Cause trav'lin's jes' to snuggle down
 An' hug up tight
 An' say "Good-night"
 'N rock away to Cuddlin'town!

How can you go to Cuddlin'town—
 To Cuddlin'town—to Cuddlin'town!
 The road is dark—there ain't a soun'
 In mudder's lap jes' snuggle down—
 She'll tuck you in,
 Then you'll begin
 To float away to Cuddlin'town!

But you can't go to Cuddlin'town—
 To Cuddlin'town—to Cuddlin'town!
 'Cause you mus' weigh a grea' big poun',
 You'd break my trav'lin' carriage down.
 Oh, poor big man!
 You never can
 Go cuddlin' down to Cuddlin'town.

MINNY MAUD HANFF.

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

By Helen Churchill Candee

Author of "An Oklahoma Romance," Etc.

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithce why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?"

WHEN Suckling jeered at sadness in this fashion, it was in times far different from these. It was in times when shepherds piped and maidens sang and danced afiel with them, for if a day were but happily spent it was not a lost day, and time was not pecked at by every daw of circumstance.

"One by one thy duties wait thee,
Let thy whole strength go to each"

was never written in the autograph book of the lover and his lass in those days. And of all love songs, the joyous ones of that time are the ones most endeared to human hearts, whether those hearts be a-flutter with present passion or serenely reminiscent. Tragedies there were, and a-plenty, as Mr. Froude and others tell us; but poets took these for granted, and only joyousness found transmission in song. Could not latter-day singers take a hint from this—that immortality lies in joyous strains? But, alas! there are always those who, like the Lady Genevieve, love best the songs that make them grieve.

The lover of the present day is rarely gay, rarely joyous. He is forceful, he is serious, he is overworked, he is ambitious—he is anything you like; but he is never joyous. I speak of the young man unchained, before he has put his fortune to the test of laying it at the maiden's feet. He can't help it, poor fellow! It is the pressure of modern

life, which he has not yet learned to take easily.

But if Phœbus Apollo should don a Norfolk jacket of unexceptionable cut and let a "gentlemen's outfitter" have his way with him, where, then, would be the knight of the woeful countenance? The seeming joy of the god would carry all before him, notwithstanding the avowed pessimism, and he would laugh away false notions about the divine efficacy of unhappiness. In the sunshine of his presence, duty would not seem incompatible with pleasure, not the pious, chastened pleasure of doing an irksome task, but a deliberate choosing of the agreeable one.

It is one's duty to be happy, and no mean duty either, as Sir John Lubbock elaborately tells us. Even in our flirtations we are decidedly serious and ponder questions of moment, when all that Cupid meant when he instituted this pretty game was to give joy a chance to be unconfined. A dainty bit of sparing, a fresh joy of living, a fillip to seriousness, that is what Cupid meant; but strenuousness and materialism have knocked all the joy out of the sport, and set it in propriety's black books. If Phœbus Apollo were here to flirt—ah, then the game would be a merry one; bright with the gold of the sun, joyous, invigorating, and, if the flirtation ended in something more lasting—why, that, too, would have a quality of joyousness that many a duty-ridden courtship lacks.

Let not fear of permanent immunity from the pressure of life prevent us from hearkening unto the voice of joy. It is soon to pass, as all things do.

"*Tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse*," says the pessimistic French proverb; but, if joy passes, it comes back again, provided we go on the sunny hilltop and whistle cheerily for it. And when it returns, it requires a light heart for its habitat, not a sodden affair packed with griefs. Like the ringlets of a straight-haired lady, joy vanishes in the uncongenial atmosphere of vapors and fogs.

And why, pray, should joy be considered selfish? Because, forsooth, saith the sad of this world, it is for one's own pleasure, and that is of necessity selfish.

Then tell me, kind seer, as I am but a seeker after knowledge, is grief unselfish? Have we no right to be glad, but a well-advertised right to be sad? Then I say unto you: "More people forget their fellows because of their own griefs than because of their own joys." Joy expands the heart; it is not content with the limitations of self, it shines out and warms the world. If a man be joyous, he is not content until he has made merry some other, for he shares his joy, as

"Happiness was born a twin,"

But grief; that, apart from love, is the most selfish of man's passions. "I cannot listen to you, my poor man; I have sorrows of my own," says one in affliction; and the two fall to such a recitation of their agonies that it might be called the rivalry of woe. And neither listens to the other, so absorbed is he with his own misery. We all remember the tale of the lady who went to an afternoon tea, and to all "How-de-do's" replied: "Very well, thank you; I was found dead in my bed this morning," but who found no one paid any intelligent attention, for they had annoyances of their own to relate.

"I think if we were never sad
We scarcely could be tender,"

says one of the mild versifiers. But console yourself, dear lady poetess; there is little danger that we shall never be sad. The heart knoweth its own bitter-

ness, and always will; but joy is its panacea, and only those who have accomplished joyousness can be truly tender. Weeping with those who weep is enervating business except as a brief assurance of understanding. Showing a man the way out of the slough of despond is truer friendship than getting mired down with him. Only the young can afford to be melancholy, and they not for long, not beyond the first touch of sorrow. At that touch they must begin to radiate joyousness.

Pessimism is a crafty schism—it draws about it the veil of mystery as does a lovely night, and it pins it with stars of the first magnitude—the gems of thought. A pessimist is supposed to have arrived at his grandly isolated estate by some profound mental process aided by tragic experience, but pessimism is perilously near morbidness and decay. "Are you a Methodist?" asked one. "No, I'm a backslider," and a pessimist is very well defined thus. Persistent, intentional optimism is what a sick world needs. "I am mortified," said a lady, loftily, "to think that the literary discrimination of my country is so low that 'David Harum' is the most widely read book of the hour." Literary discrimination had nothing to do with it. It was the delicious optimism of the book that carried it. Those who are fed on problem novels and screeds on streams of tendency, turn with an abandon of joy to a book that has no object but to entertain and make men forget a serious thing or two, while their morals take no harm.

After even this little lapse of time, what is most affectionately remembered of the works of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson—his mathematical results or the utterly joyous nonsense he wrote as "Lewis Carroll"? A few professors and students will associate him with abstruse, dry-as-dust problems, but in his family annals he will always be known as an apostle of joy, and to the great public—why, we hug him to our hearts, gloat over him in childhood, and return many times later to drink at his pure fount of joy. The consolation that lies in a long-meter hymn of Charles Wes-

Iey's, where virtue triumphs sadly, is not to be compared to the joy communicated by the Jabberwock.

"'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and wimble in the wake."
The scene is set, the battle wages:—
'And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, thou beamish boy.
Oh! frabjous day! Calloah! Callay!
He chortled in his joy."

There are times in this vale of tears when one would give much to be able to chortle with joy.

Lewis Carroll (that is the best name, for it is his merry one), made *Sylvie* and *Bruno* the vehicle of his convictions. It was written with a purpose Christian and philanthropic; it was a noble effort to uphold the right. And as a candidate for popular favor it failed. Think on this, you who write sad and serious books, and put your pen once more to paper, but give us some product of the gospel of joy, for we like it notwithstanding our stockade of seriousness.

Among recent novelettes is one which has as its hero a new brand. He is not forceful through strenuousness, he has no magnificent aims of grappling questions of the day, he is simply the embodiment of joy. "His very steps were joyous, his whole personality seemed to radiate an atmosphere of firm content," and he declares that if he had the teaching of the people, he would "teach them joy."

At this particular time of our nation's progress, what a particularly comfortable person to have about would this young man be, whose face, we are told, wore always "a look of simple happiness unfamiliar in New York."

Just now we need this sort of hero, one who will teach the gospel of joy. We are extremely busy becoming world-beaters, and have no time for "quips, and cranks, and wanton wiles." Joy seems in some way to interfere with progress; it argues content, and every American knows the dangers of that sluggish virtue.

If we are content we murder ambition, and then the other fellow gets ahead. Beating the other man in the

race, getting rich, as distinguished from enriching the nation, this is the pattern which the weavers of the web of life set up before them. No wonder we are strained and anxious, and take no pleasure in leisure. If we stop a while that joy made lodge with us, the other man is using that chance to outstrip us. And so the sparkling lights of joy are covered with a dingy cloth misnamed duty, and men and women sacrifice them to their god, ambition.

It is undoubtedly true that we like the joyous things, but the complexity of modern life harasses us until light-heartedness seems as incongruous as love-birds in the Stock Exchange. It is not that we cling to the Puritan idea of poison in pleasantness, but the grip of affairs is on us, and we haven't time in which to take them easily.

"He seems to be smiling all the while, but I don't like him very much," said a frightened little boy, politely, on being shown a skeleton. This is the comment inspired by those persons who possess a glittering cheerfulness which has self-satisfaction as its root and sustenance. Count them not among the children of light, for they irritate more than they please, and their hearts are closed to the great band of the wretched. That kind of smile is not the sort that cheers, for it is almost jeering; but there are those who value almost any kind. "Look pleasant, boy," commanded an enraged father, with a descending switch; "if you don't smile instantly I'll whip you again."

"The gladness of a spirit is an index of its power," says one of the writers, whose name escapes me, but if the thought lives the writer ought to be satisfied to pass cheerfully into oblivion. And to this might be added Amiel's words: "To live we must have the courage to be happy."

This, then, is the difference between the glacial cheerfulness of the insensate and the joyousness that warms and illumines like the sun. One is a covering for selfishness, the other is an attainment won at great pains, but possessing the power to gladden all of life for the possessor and those who fortunately

come within his circle. Suffering has begotten sympathy in the true child of light, and through pain has he learned the value of joy.

It is by deliberate choice that one is joyful, light-hearted; through a conviction that it is only fair to one's fellows. "I am glad because I have chosen to be glad, and because I have won my content. There is a strenuous peace for those who can fight their way through to it." It is very plain that if you have it not, your gray moods are an evidence of defeat.

"The pursuit of happiness," the great document accords to us; life and liberty it grants us outright, but happiness is set at the end of pursuit. But it is all the better worth having for a difficult chase. Joy is not our common portion, but is a matter to be sought courageously and intelligently by a process both intellectual and moral.

"What makes a man a strong man?" says Lubbock, and the answer is "Practice." "What makes a man a good athlete? Practice." What makes a man a joyous man? Practice.

STELLA AND STOCKINGS

By Ethel Sigsbee Small

I SAW what I thought was a small and dainty edition of Santa Claus moving toward me, but on nearer view it proved to be Stella.

She was "dressed all in fur" from her head to her foot, and while her clothes were not "covered with ashes and soot," there were little sparkly flakes everywhere, which, though spoiling rhyme and meter, were certainly more attractive. Even at this distance I could see her cheeks flaming like Christmas candles. She certainly looked like Santa Claus, and I told her so when she met me.

"How rude of you!" she cried; "the idea of telling a nice girl she reminds you of a fat old man," and she began batting her bright eyes at me over her muff.

This is one of Stella's most alluring tricks. She does it when displeased, as little children do it when they are sent away to bed, and it is intended to dismay her victim. The poor girl does not know that it never accomplishes its

purpose, for those lucky ones at whom the bats are directed are so fascinated in watching the fluttering of her lids they forget quite what they have been talking about. Some particularly stupid ones even think she is flirting with them, and go away jubilant when they should be most crushed. However, I am not one of these, so I pulled a long face and looked miserable.

"Never mind," said Stella, charitably, for she has the kindest heart in the world; "you meant to be complimentary, I suppose. Anyway," she added, "I always thought Santa Claus a very lovable old gentleman."

"So do I," I cried, with perhaps unnecessary violence, "the most adorable old gentleman in the world. I love every bit of him, from his fluffy yellow head to his pretty little feet."

"Aren't you getting a bit mixed?" asked Stella. "And I wish you wouldn't stare so!" But she looked a little pleased, so I gave her vanity a tweak.

"I was looking at your nose," I said,

dreamily. "It's the loveliest shade of pink—that deep, rich shade so suggestive of Christmas; the color that looks well with turkey and holly leaves." But Stella was already some feet away from me, steaming along like a little tug.

"Why do you hurry so?" I asked, innocently, as I caught up with her, though to tell the truth I was fearing I had gone too far.

Stella trotted ahead scornfully, the offended feature burrowing, sulkily, into the fur of her muff.

"Lovely day," I panted, for Stella's speed had now become like nothing in the world but an automobile, "crisp—snappy—makes your blood tingle—gives you color——" Stella gave a little lurch forward, and quickened her pace. I saw something must be done or I die of apoplexy. So I mentioned the Appleton's dance, and had the instant pleasure of seeing her go a beautiful pink, and settle down to a respectable walk again.

The Appleton's dance is the sword which I hold over Stella's head, and which keeps her willful spirit in check. She knows me too well to think I would ever tell what happened on that memorable evening, but she daily lives in terror of hearing me mention it to herself.

She said on one occasion when I had goaded her to desperation by references to that night: "I can't think what ever made me such an idiot—I would sooner die than be such a fool again!" All of which, though scarcely complimentary to myself, shows what importance she attaches to the incident and my resulting power over her. At all events, she *was* a fool, and it comes in very handily on occasions—this one, for instance.

It took Stella two blocks of steady walking to reduce the flush my words had caused and to allow her to look at me.

"Are you going to hang up your stocking, Mr. Randall?" asked Stella, when the two blocks lay behind us. The "Mr. Randall" was my punishment, but I affected not to be dismayed by it.

"No," I said, "I have dark recollections of a time when a long switch was

the result of my practicing that Christmas pastime. The thought of it makes me nervous even now. I always take the precaution of hiding my stockings Christmas Eve just to make sure."

"You must have been a dreadfully naughty little boy," said Stella, disapprovingly. "Now, my brothers get goodies, and horns, and things. I fill their stockings every Christmas Eve."

"If you will fill mine, I will hang it up," I volunteered, valiantly.

"I won't do that, but you may come to-night, and help me fill theirs," she answered, sweetly.

"There is some difference," I said, disappointed, "but I'll come. I hope they won't all come trooping down to the parlor, though—the boys I mean, not the stockings—I shall bring a stack of switches with me in case they do. It would do them good after getting goodies, and horns, and things all these years."

Stella paused before her door.

"I'll expect you at eight," she said. "You'd better go home now and rest—you're all out of breath, and puffing horribly. Old gentlemen shouldn't exercise too violently," and she had gone before I could say a word about the Appleton's dance. However, I contented myself with thinking up new and devilish ways of putting it to her as I walked along.

I supposed myself alone as I entered the parlor of Stella's home, but a glance upward showed me a pair of feet and ankles perched on top of a stepladder. There was apparently nothing more than just these and the heavy branches of a Christmas tree. However, I am not particular, so I addressed the ankles.

"Good-evening," I remarked, blandly, "you are looking charming to-night. I always liked red, and zigzags are a passion with me."

The stepladder gave a little jump like a frightened steed, and I heard a gasp from the center of the Christmas tree. I am not a nervous man, otherwise I might have been alarmed at these proceedings which one must admit are not usual.

"I never knew such a man!" exclaimed Stella, emerging little by little from her green retreat until, finally, a very red face and a mass of disheveled hair met my gaze.

"So they all say," I murmured, modestly.

Stella ignored me, and began to work very busily at the back of her skirt, which I observed had a strange, draped appearance. Another moment and the train of it had fallen over her silk petticoat, and ankles, zigzags, and all were things of the past. Selfishly pleased at having deprived me of an innocent pastime, she straightened her hair and beamed down on me.

"I was trimming the Christmas tree," she explained, brightly.

"I don't believe it," I said, firmly. "I think you were indulging a hoydenish passion for climbing. However, you may go on—I don't mind," and I looked magnanimous.

"I certainly intend to," returned Stella, with horrid independence, and she picked off a glittery, red thing that had found lodgment in her hair, and tied it to the tree.

"You aren't doing it right," I insisted.

"What is the matter?" asked Stella, surprised.

"You were doing it differently when I came in," I explained, and I looked despondently at the place where the ankles had been.

"Don't talk nonsense," commanded Stella.

I sat down much hurt, for I had felt very strongly in the matter; then seeing Stella to be adamant I got up again, and submitted in the worst possible grace to the handing up of things to her. I could not but feel I had been a jolly fool not to have sat quietly down when I entered. But then one never thinks of things until too late.

"There!" said Stella, drawing her brows into a little bunch and surveying the tree critically, "I think that is all," and she bestowed the finishing touch in the shape of a long and lumpy dancing girl, who dangled helplessly from her twig as though ashamed of herself,

which is the most I can say in her favor.

As I had long ago lost all interest in the tree I was not sorry it was finished, and put up my hands to help Stella down.

"Do you think you can hold me?" asked Stella, doubtfully, looking first at the floor, and then at me as if I were some tender flower whom the first touch would wither.

"I will do my best," I rejoined, crossly, for I am proud of my biceps, and did not like the imputation.

"I'm heavier than you think," she went on, jumping on the ladder a little as if to give me some idea of what to expect. I looked my scorn.

"Well, if you *really* think you can—"

She deserved punishment, and I gave it.

"After all, I'm afraid I can't," I said, coldly, "the doctor has given me decided injunctions against straining myself. I think you had better get down by yourself," and I sank, feebly, into the nearest chair.

For an instant fire flashed in Stella's eyes, but the next moment wistfulness had taken its place. She is an artful creature, and not above using her wiles on an unprotected man. If I had stopped to think a moment I would certainly have become aware of what must have been a fact, that as Stella had got up by herself she was quite capable of getting down again. Her dejection, then, was unnecessary, and her wistfulness acting, but I took it for genuine. When her mouth drooped like a sad baby's, and two tears stole their bright way into her eyes, I was on my feet in a twinkling. She gave me a small hand, and let the smooth fingers curl invitingly about my own. I put my arm around her and slowly, very slowly drew her from the ladder—

"Stel!" came in a loud and sibilant whisper from the door, "has he come yet?"

Stella wriggled from my arms. I say "wriggled" because that is just what she did, and no more dignified adjective will express it. I turned a

menacing countenance on the intruder. I am sure Stella was as provoked as I, but she would never have shown it—dear no! She smiled upon the small boy whose head alone was visible around the corner of the door.

"Has who come, sweetest?" she asked.

"Thanty," answered "Sweetest," mysteriously. "Thanty," I believe, is baby for Santa Claus.

"Why no—not yet; now go to bed like a good boy." Then as the wee face grew sad she relented. "Come in and take one little peep at the tree. Don't tell the other boys, though."

Sweetest, who was christened Archibald, entered boldly. The fact that he wore merely an undershirt seemed in no way to embarrass him. He was above all such petty conventionalities. I admired him for his independence, but Stella drove him from the room. His howls, the wails of innocence misunderstood, came back to us as he toiled upward.

"It is a beautiful evening," remarked Stella, going to the window to lean a hot cheek against the pane.

I saw she wished no reference made to our latest adventure, so for once I respected her desire and agreed with her, though it was raining, snowing and hailing all at once outside.

"It is a night to make one thankful for a home and lots of warm clothing," she went on musingly.

"Yes," I responded, absently, thinking of Archibald and of how he despised his blessings. Stella must have thought of this, too, for she turned abruptly from the window.

"It really is time for me to begin on the children's stockings," she exclaimed, feverishly, and I agreed with her.

Stella produced three long, black things and a box from behind the Christmas tree and put them down on the sofa beside her. There was a very small space left at one end between Stella and the sofa arm. I waited for an invitation; then, one not being forthcoming, took this seat. I know the line between modesty and foolishness and draw it.

"This," said Stella, holding up a particularly long and silky stocking, "is Archibald's."

"It seems your entire family is partial to zigzags," said I. "Archibald's indiscretions are only equaled by his good taste in hose. I will fill Archibald's stocking."

"Here is a silver dollar for the toe," remarked Stella, looking as if she wanted to laugh and wouldn't, "a silver dollar always goes in the toe."

"Of course," I answered, affecting an air of wisdom, and I slipped the coin in.

Stella was cramming the legs of the other stockings. I saw how she did and copied her. I thought I was doing beautifully when suddenly she stopped me.

"Don't put that candy man in on his head!" she exclaimed.

"Why?" I asked, injured. "He looks very nice that way. I thought that particularly neat of me. What he loses in dignity he gains in charm—"

"Stop babbling," said Stella, "and pull him out."

I put my hand into the stocking and struggled feebly.

"I can't get him out," I said at last with a tired sigh.

"Give a pull," ordered Stella, frowning.

I made a wry face as if the exertion I was making hurt me.

"No use," I said.

"Why, I can't see what holds him," said Stella, and dived her small hand into the stocking.

"Let me come out," said a small, cold voice all at once.

"Can't you get out either?" I inquired with concern. "Really this is a most peculiar stocking. What goes in must stay in, it seems."

"Please let me go," murmured Stella.

I turned to look at her. Her shining head was bent down and the lashes on her cheeks were like twilight shadows on a sunset sky. I made a mental resolve never to surrender the fingers when, suddenly, they turned to curl softly about my own.

"Please let me," she repeated.

I held them a bit closer for an instant,

then released them. It seemed to me they went a bit unwillingly.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Stella, with a relieved sigh, and added: "I'm glad you've come to your senses!"

I was glad, too. I had come too near letting them escape me not to feel a sense of pleasure at their return. For a moment or two we continued to fill the stockings, in silence.

"I didn't know Archibald began with 'S,'" I remarked at last.

"Why, what do you mean?" exclaimed Stella, looking up. I was gazing at a small letter worked in white at the top of the stocking.

"Oh, nothing," I said, carelessly. "'S' is for Sweetest, I suppose. How stupid of me."

"My stockings are finished," said Stella. She held up a swinging length of knobiness in either hand.

"I don't like the contour," I remarked, critically. "Now mine has some symmetry—yours are all bumps and humps. However, the two boys won't mind. Archibald, however, I feel is particular. He will appreciate the poetry of this," and I swung the finished stocking out before me.

I thought Stella looked a little tired.

"Since my work is done it is time to go, I suppose," I said, gently. "Good-night, Stella."

"Good-night," answered Stella, softly.

Now as it happened, that was the very thing she should not have said. If she had cried "Don't go; why it isn't late—stay and chat a little," I would have laughed and shaken my head and gone. But she said "Good-night," and, what is more, she said it absently, as if she were caring not at all whether I went or stayed, and she said it, too, with a pretty little yawn, but half concealed, and that fired me.

It was an unfortunate accident that she should have happened to be standing by the Christmas tree at that instant. The little rosy balls and the tinsel made a glittering background for her pretty head, and one green spray touched the waving masses of her hair tenderly, caressingly, as a man might.

The tinsel and glitter seemed in some way to have got into her eyes.

"Good-night, Stella," I whispered, and drew nearer.

My one chance of escape lay in the possibility she might not turn from me, but—where was my guardian angel that night?—had the Christmas elves perverted her? Stella drew herself away. She half turned her head and I caught a profile view of her demure little nose and brow, and the saucy chin that mocked at their sobriety. I tried not to notice the mouth, but its fresh, red curves would not be ignored, and against my will I saw them.

"Oh!" gasped Stella.

She struggled a moment, then yielded herself to my arms. I remained lost in wonder of how they could have stayed empty of her for so long.

"You dear, dear boy," whispered Stella, and cuddled her head on my shoulder.

This was too much. I made one last attempt.

"The Appleton's dance," I murmured faintly, thinking she might run from me and save me yet.

"Pooh!" cried Stella, scornfully, and, turning her head, the audacious creature actually repeated her offense of that evening.

Then I knew that it was all over, that come what might I was Stella's forever and always, and I put my lips to her ear and told her so. It was a very sad case, and yet to save my soul I could not get up a single degree of pity for myself, and when Stella, lifting her dear eyes, whispered she was mine and would never run from me again, I was filled with such joy that I could have swept her away with me then and there and never returned her.

We sat down on the sofa and whispered together. I said we would take a flat, and Stella said no; she preferred a house, and I said I preferred a house, too. Doubtless I would have been there whispering yet had not a curly head peeped around the door:

"Stel," said a small, awed voice, "isn't it Christmas morning?"

A VOICE FOR SANTA CLAUS

By Joseph C. Lincoln
Author of "Cape Cod Ballads"

READ it last week in the paper, ha'f of a page it had;
Read it out loud to mother; my, but it made her mad!
Somethin' some college feller said in a mile-long speech,
That Santy Claus was a humbug that nobody ought to teach;
That tellin' the children stories of how he comes through the snow
To bring 'em their toys and dollies, was wicked and bad and low;
That him and his prancin' reindeer, his pack and his old red sleigh,
Was nothin' but lyin' nonsense that ought to be thrown away.

Nothin' but lyin' nonsense, teachin' a child deceit?
Nothin' but fairy stories? Maybe, but ain't they sweet?
What would you give, you fellers,—gray-headed granddads all,
Workin' from morn till evenin', over this hard old ball,—
What would you give in money, cash that you work for so,
To b'lieve in the fairy stories you b'lieved in long ago?
What would you sell your past for? How much would close the deal
That bought up your mem'ries' treasures of days when them tales was real?

Christmas without a Santy? 'Member the nights before?
'Member how hard you listened, hearin' the old folks snore,
Hearin' the wind a-whistlin' up in the chimney flue,
There in the place where Santy somehow would wiggle through?
'Member the Christmas mornin's? 'Member the stockin's? What?
Wasn't they filled with glories? Nothin' that cost a lot,
But, 'cause old Santy brought 'em, wonderful things, you bet!
'Member just how you loved him? Some of us love him yet.

Christmas without a Santy? Puddin' without the plums!
Think of the million youngsters waitin' the day he comes,
Countin' the hours and minutes, thinkin' they hear his sleigh,
Jest as their daddies heard it, back in another day.
Nothin' but lyin' nonsense, wicked to spread around?
Then I'm a wicked liar long's I'm above the ground.
Long as I've got a roof-tree, while there's a chimney flue,
Santy shall come to my house. How is it, folks, with you?

A CHAPARRAL CHRISTMAS GIFT

By O. Henry

THE original cause of the trouble was about twenty years in growing.

At the end of that time it was worth it.

Had you lived anywhere within fifty miles of Sundown Ranch you would have heard of it. It possessed a quantity of jet-black hair, a pair of extremely frank, deep-brown eyes and a laugh that rippled across the prairie like the sound of a hidden brook. The name of it was Rosita McMullen; and she was the daughter of old man McMullen of the Sundown Sheep Ranch.

There came riding on red roan steeds—or, to be more explicit, on a paint and a flea-bitten sorrel—two wooers. One was Madison Lane, and the other was the Frio Kid. But at that time they did not call him the Frio Kid, for he had not earned the honors of special nomenclature. His name was simply Johnny McRoy.

It must not be supposed that these two were the sum of the agreeable Rosita's admirers. The bronchos of a dozen others champed their bits at the long hitching rack of the Sundown Ranch. Many were the sheeps'-eyes that were cast in those savannas that did not belong to the flocks of Dan McMullen. But of all the cavaliers, Madison Lane and Johnny McRoy galloped far ahead, wherefore they are to be chronicled.

Madison Lane, a young cattleman from the Nueces country, won the race. He and Rosita were married one Christmas day. Armed, hilarious, vociferous, magnanimous, the cowmen and the

sheepmen, laying aside their hereditary hatred, joined forces to celebrate the occasion.

Sundown Ranch was sonorous with the cracking of jokes and sixshooters, the shine of buckles and bright eyes, the outspoken congratulations of the herders of kine.

But while the wedding feast was at its liveliest there descended upon it Johnny McRoy, bitten by jealousy, like one possessed.

"I'll give you a Christmas present," he yelled, shrilly, at the door, with his .45 in his hand. Even then he had some reputation as an offhand shot.

His first bullet cut a neat underbit in Madison Lane's right ear. The barrel of his gun moved an inch. The next shot would have been the bride's had not Carson, a sheepman, possessed a mind with triggers somewhat well oiled and in repair. The guns of the wedding party had been hung, in their belts, upon nails in the wall when they sat at table, as a concession to good taste. But Carson, with great promptness, hurled his plate of roast venison and frijoles at McRoy, spoiling his aim. The second bullet, then, only shattered the white petals of a Spanish dagger flower suspended two feet above Rosita's head.

The guests spurned their chairs and jumped for their weapons. It was considered an improper act to shoot the bride and groom at a wedding. In about six seconds there were twenty-or-so bullets due to be whizzing in the direction of Mr. McRoy.

"I'll shoot better next time," yelled

Johnny; "and there'll be a next time." He backed rapidly out the door.

Carson, the sheepman, spurred on to attempt further exploits by the success of his plate-throwing, was first to reach the door. McRoy's bullet from the darkness laid him low.

The cattlemen then swept out upon him, calling for vengeance, for, while the slaughter of a sheepman has not always lacked condonement, it was a decided misdemeanor in this instance. Carson was innocent; he was no accomplice at the matrimonial proceedings; nor had any one heard him quote the line "Christmas comes but once a year" to the guests.

But the sortie failed in its vengeance. McRoy was on his horse and away, shouting back curses and threats as he galloped into the concealing chaparral.

That night was the birthnight of the Frio Kid. He became the "bad man" of that portion of the State. The rejection of his suit by Miss McMullen turned him to a dangerous man. When officers went after him for the shooting of Carson, he killed two of them, and entered upon the life of an outlaw. He became a marvelous shot with either hand. He would turn up in towns and settlements, raise a quarrel at the slightest opportunity, pick off his man and laugh at the officers of the law. He was so cool, so deadly, so rapid, so inhumanly bloodthirsty that none but faint attempts were ever made to capture him. When he was at last shot and killed by a little one-armed Mexican who was nearly dead himself from fright, the Frio Kid had the deaths of eighteen men on his head. About half of these were killed in fair duels depending upon the quickness of the draw. The other half were men whom he assassinated from absolute wantonness and cruelty.

Many tales are told along the border of his impudent courage and daring. But he was not one of the breed of desperadoes who have seasons of generosity and even of softness. They say he never had mercy on the object of his anger. Yet at this and every Christmastide it is well to give each one

credit, if it can be done, for whatever speck of good he may have possessed. If the Frio Kid ever did a kindly act or felt a throb of generosity in his heart it was once at such a time and season, and this is the way it happened.

One who has been crossed in love should never breathe the odor from the blossoms of the ratama tree. It stirs the memory to a dangerous degree.

One December in the Frio country there was a ratama tree in full bloom, for the winter had been as warm as springtime. That way rode the Frio Kid and his satellite and co-murderer, Mexican Frank. The Kid reined in his mustang, and sat in his saddle, thoughtful and grim, with dangerously narrowing eyes. The rich, sweet scent touched him somewhere beneath his ice and iron.

"I don't know what I been thinking about, Mex," he remarked in his usual mild drawl, "to have forgot all about a Christmas present I got to give. I'm going to ride over to-morrow night and shoot Madison Lane in his own house. He got my girl—Rosita would have had me if he hadn't cut into the game. I wonder why I happened to overlook it up to now?"

"Ah, shucks, Kid," said Mexican, "don't talk foolishness. You know you can't get within a mile of Mad Lane's house to-morrow night. I see old man Allen day before yesterday, and he says Mad is going to have Christmas doings at his house. You remember how you shot up the festivities when Mad was married, and about the threats you made? Don't you suppose Mad Lane'll kind of keep his eye open for a certain Mr. Kid? You plumb make me tired, Kid, with such remarks."

"I'm going," repeated the Frio Kid, without heat, "to go to Madison Lane's Christmas doings, and kill him. I ought to have done it a long time ago. Why, Mex, just two weeks ago I dreamed me and Rosita was married instead of her and him; and we was living in a house, and I could see her smiling at me, and—oh! h—l, Mex, he got her; and I'll get him—yes, sir, on Christmas Eve he got her, and then's when I'll get him."

"There's other ways of committing suicide," advised Mexican. "Why don't you go and surrender to the sheriff?"

"I'll get him," said the Kid.

Christmas Eve fell as balmy as April. Perhaps there was a hint of far-away frostiness in the air, but it tingled like seltzer, perfumed faintly with late prairie blossoms and the mesquite grass.

When night came the five or six rooms of the ranch house were brightly lit. In one room was a Christmas tree, for the Lanes had a boy of three, and a dozen or more guests were expected from the nearer ranches.

At nightfall Madison Lane called aside Jim Belcher and three other cowboys employed on his ranch.

"Now, boys," said Lane, "keep your eyes open. Walk around the house and watch the road well. All of you know the 'Frio Kid,' as they call him now, and if you see him, open fire on him without asking any questions. I'm not afraid of his coming around, but Rosita is. She's been afraid he'd come in on us every Christmas since we were married."

The guests had arrived in buckboards and on horseback, and were making themselves comfortable inside.

The evening went along pleasantly. The guests enjoyed and praised Rosita's excellent supper, and afterward the men scattered in groups about the rooms or on the broad "gallery," smoking and chatting.

The Christmas tree, of course, delighted the youngsters, and above all were they pleased when Santa Claus himself in magnificent white beard and furs appeared and began to distribute the toys.

"It's my papa," announced Billy Sampson, aged six. "I've seen him wear 'em before."

Berkly, a sheepman, an old friend of Lane, stopped Rosita as she was passing by him on the gallery, where he was sitting smoking.

"Well, Mrs. Lane," said he, "I suppose by this Christmas you've gotten over being afraid of that fellow McRoy, haven't you? Madison and I have talked about it, you know."

"Very nearly," said Rosita, smiling, "but I am still nervous sometimes. I shall never forget that awful time when he came so near to killing us."

"He's the most cold-hearted villain in the world," said Berkly. "The citizens all along the border ought to turn out and hunt him down like a wolf."

"He has committed awful crimes," said Rosita, "but—I—don't—know. I think there is a spot of good somewhere in everybody. He was not always bad—that I know."

Rosita turned into the hallway between the rooms. Santa Claus, in muffling whiskers and furs, was just coming through.

"I heard what you said through the window, Mrs. Lane," he said. "I was just going down in my pocket for a Christmas present for your husband. But I've left one for you, instead. It's in the room to your right."

"Oh, thank you, kind Santa Claus," said Rosita, brightly.

Rosita went into the room, while Santa Claus stepped into the cooler air of the yard.

She found no one in the room but Madison.

"Where is my present that Santa said he left for me in here?" she asked.

"Haven't seen anything in the way of a present," said her husband, laughing, "unless he could have meant me."

The next day Gabriel Radd, the foreman of the X O Ranch, dropped into the post office at Loma Alta.

"Well, the Frio Kid's got his dose of lead at last," he remarked to the postmaster.

"That so? How'd it happen?"

"One of old Sanchez's Mexican sheep herders did it—think of it! the Frio Kid killed by a sheep herder! The Greaser saw him riding along past his camp about twelve o'clock last night, and was so skeered that he up with a Winchester and let him have it. Funniest part of it was that the Kid was dressed all up with white Angora-skin whiskers and a regular Santy Claus rig-out from head to foot. Think of the Frio Kid playing Santy!"

CHRISTMAS TIME IN GLOUCESTER

By Holman F. Day

Author of "Maine Ballads," Etc.

THERE'S a curl o' caps to lee'ard seems to beckon us away;
There's a rurrin' in the riggin' seems to whisper not to stay.
All the night the waves come pattin', like the hands o' drowned men
Coaxed us down the seas to'ards Glo'ster with the warnin' "Home again!"
Ev'ry dory yaws to s'uthard when her painter swings her clear,
It's the course for which she hankers—it's the course we're goin' to steer
Down with dagon-weight an' trawl-lines! Quick an' steady on the pull,
Cod an' pollock, hake an' haddock, gaff 'em in an' pile her full.
Then it's so'-so-west from Quero soon as all our salt is wet,
Till the lights on Ann are blinkin' through the spindrift, rack an' wet.
Race o' lonesome sea to wind'ard, cold an' gray an' pilin' high,
Santy Claus starn-chase behind us through the snowflakes in the sky;
Lights o' home a-wink afore us, all a-sparkle on the shore,
Christmas time in Glo'ster, an' home once more.

Yeak an' yawk o' pulleys, an' a slattin' of the sails,
Double reefs an' snug below—come on, ye nor'rard gales!
Ye're drivin' us to Glo'ster an' Santy's von ashore,
We heard his frosty jingle 'fore we left the Bay Shore,
So it's ho, afore the norther, we have got to race him in.
I tell ye, boys, she's able, and his reindeers never'll win.
There's something sort o' Christmassy about a rousin' fare,
An' I think a wink to Santy won't be wasted if we're there.
Then it's crack on all she'll carry, til we raise the lights on Ann,
Give her wind an' give her wickin'; let him overhaul who can!
The younkens are a-waitin', an' the woman's at the door,
Christmas time in Glo'ster, an' home once more.

Cold an' wet an' harrycane, these are all our own;
Palms are gouged by trawl-lines; chilled to marrowbone.
Nothin' much ahead of us, shape o' worldly truck,
But we've got an honest livin' when we haven't lost our luck.
Thank God our deck is under us, the gear is taut above,
An' the wind is fair for Glo'ster, an' ahead are those we love.
Wilted wreaths of evergreen curl on Cherry Hill,
Lots o' Glo'ster widders mourn an' gaze to east'ard still;
Lots o' Glo'ster little tots haven't dads to say,
"Brim them stockin's, Santy, else ye'll never git away!"
The harbor rote is callin' us, we've got a rousin' fare,
We can chink our trousers' pockets with a hefty, honest share,
So here we come a-rollickin' from Quero an' Shelore,
Christmas time in Glo'ster, an' home once more.

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TWO MEN AND A GIRL

By Oscar King Davis

STURGES came abruptly into the club and slammed the door so hard that it failed to latch. Before the alert attendant could shut it, every corner of the room had been searched out by the November wind that was whistling across the prairie straight from the snow-capped mountains forty miles to the north. Capt. Lafferty shivered as the cold air struck him, and drew closer to the fire roaring on the broad hearth.

"Confound you young cubs," he snarled, "can't you come into a room without bringing all outdoors with you? One would think you had been brought up in a sawmill!"

Sturges smiled pleasantly as he turned his back to the blazing logs, and flicked his leather leggings with his riding whip.

"Yes, I know you would," he replied. "But I'd hate to be responsible for all your mistakes!"

Lafferty's thin face flushed, and there was an angry gleam in his eyes.

"You didn't learn that at the Point!" he exclaimed. "It's a pity your training didn't stick!"

Sturges was only a lieutenant, and from the proud height of his year and a half with double bars on his straps, Capt. Lafferty looked down on the younger officer with no attempt to conceal his regret that cadet discipline did not obtain in the commissioned service. Sturges moved a little away from the fire, and turned toward the older man with a quizzical grin:

"No back talk then, was there!" he said.

"There was not," replied Lafferty, with a snap.

"Thinking of 'Lady' Burnham, were you, by chance?" asked Sturges.

Lafferty paled suddenly, and impulsively his hand went to his face, and caressed a livid scar that crossed his right cheek from the corner of the eye. The three or four men in the room had been paying small attention to the colloquy before the fire, but now Thornton, the junior captain, cut in.

"What's the matter with you, Sturges?" he asked.

"Oh, I learned to play give and take when I was a plebe," responded the lieutenant, as he touched the bell for the attendant. "What you fellows going to take? Have one with me, Lafferty?"

But Lafferty only threw on his greatcoat, and strode out of the door without a word.

"That was giving it to him pretty stiff, Sturges," said Thornton, when the older man had gone.

"Well, it was time," replied the lieutenant. "Ever since I joined he has been feeding it to me hard, and I am tired of it. I suppose it was tough bringing up Burnham, but thunder, Lafferty is not the only second classman who has called out a plebe, and got a good licking for his pains. They forgot it, why can't he?"

"Perhaps it's because he has a reminder that he can't get rid of," suggested Thornton.

"That scar! I suppose that does keep him in mind of it. But I forget my news. Who do you guess has transferred to us?"

"Give it up," said several of the others in chorus. "Who?"

"Burnham," answered Sturges. "I suppose it was thinking of his coming

that made me flash that old business on Lafferty."

"Who goes?" asked Thornton.

"Embury. You know he came to us from the Nineteenth on his promotion, and Burnham's step took him there. Now, 'Lady' has transferred in order to let Embury back to his old regiment. That's just like Burnham. He'll never be in a regiment he can call his own for always doing favors for others."

"He doesn't need it," said Thornton, "he's got the whole army."

"Lucky 'Lady'!" exclaimed Sturges, softly. "He is a good fellow," with strong accent on the verb. "No wonder everybody loves him—everybody but Lafferty."

"Wonder how they'll get on together here," said Thornton.

"Oh, they'll be all right," declared Sturges. "Burnham would get on with anybody, and, besides, he never held up anything against Lafferty. It was all over with him as soon as the fight ended. Lafferty's the one who has held the grudge. Talk about a man getting out of the wrong side of the bed, he must have been born there!"

Poor Lafferty! Unusually brilliant and accomplished as he was, his unfortunate disposition had already come near to ruining his career. In the technical attainments of his profession few men in the Service were his equals, but with rank and file alike his cross-grained temper spoiled his effectiveness, and prevented a success that otherwise would have been assured.

In three days every man at the post had forgotten the incident in the club, except Lafferty. It was one of the things he would never forget. And the longer he remembered it the more it rankled, the deeper it burned. From the day of the fight behind the old cavalry stables at West Point, when the plebe he had called out gave him the beating which left that ugly scar on his cheek, he had hated Burnham with an earnestness that sometimes frightened him. Now Sturges was involved in the same feeling. All the week Lafferty kept his room except when on duty, and nursed his hatred with wild schemes for the dis-

grace of both men. Happy-go-lucky Sturges, popular with his fellows, the idol of his troop, would scarcely have wasted a thought on it if he had dreamed of Lafferty's feeling, and as for Burnham, he would have laughed and offered Lafferty a drink.

Burnham joined the regiment the second day after the tilt in the club, and almost immediately justified his reputation by shifting commands to accommodate Orson, who thus got back the troop with which he had put in all his service. Sturges was delighted with the change, for it brought him his old friend as captain, and before an hour had gone by after the transfer was arranged, the two were deep in plans and schemes to make their troop the crack of the regiment. Burnham met Lafferty with friendly advance, but the older man maintained an icy reserve, and Burnham turned gladly to the more genial occupation of his troop work.

That was the situation when the girl came to the fort. Up to that time there had been almost no possibility of a contest between Burnham and Lafferty which would develop a crisis. Burnham was too good-natured to be drawn into acrid controversy, and too much engrossed in his work to care for other things. From his first year at West Point it had been so. No man in his class possessed such potentiality for social popularity as he, and none seemed to care less for it. It was this easily won, yet lightly worn, leadership that in his early days at the military academy fastened on him the nickname of "Lady," which he was destined to carry into his commissioned service. Man after man of his class "met his fate," and Burnham had been usher or best man at so many of their weddings that he had lost the count. Still, he remained a bachelor.

The mid-November hop was the first purely social event at the post after Burnham joined his new regiment. The old drill hall was gayly decorated for the occasion. It was a rickety structure that had been condemned by board after board, but still it had not been replaced, and because the space

was more ample and the floor better, it was preferred for dancing to any other of the available buildings.

Burnham came in a little late, with Sturges. The dance was in full swing, the soft music of the band and the hum of merry talk and laughter filling the long room. As the two men picked their way across the floor they paused for a second to let a couple pass, and Burnham saw, with a little surprise, that the man was Lafferty. Sturges saw, too, and touched his friend on the shoulder.

"Look there!" he said. "Achilles has quit sulking in his tent!" Then as the couple swung so that he saw the girl's face, he exclaimed, with such force as to carry his voice across the room:

"By Jove!"

Both men were standing in the middle of the floor watching Lafferty and the girl. Burnham was the first to realize what they were doing. He grabbed Sturges by the arm, and said, sharply:

"Come on!"

Then as they moved swiftly toward the place where the colonel's wife was standing at the head of the reception line, he added, quickly:

"Do you know who she is?"

"Know her!" exclaimed Sturges, "why it's Mildred St. John, you duffer. Don't you recognize your old love? She danced you half through your first cadet hop!"

"The deuce she did," retorted Burnham, non-committally. But Sturges did not hear.

"I wonder what she's doing here," he said.

"Dancing with Lafferty, can't you see?"

Sturges ignored the interruption.

"Where did she come from, and when, I mean," he said. "Whom is she visiting? Come on, man, you'll be put out for staring, if you're not careful. I never saw you act so. Let's ask Mrs. Barry."

They dashed up to the colonel's wife as if bent on rescuing her from some terrible danger. They had hardly raced through the formalities before Sturges was asking:

"When did Mildred St. John come, Mrs. Barry? Whom is she visiting?"

Mrs. Barry regarded them quizzically for a moment, and then turning to the lady at her side, said:

"Mrs. St. John, here are two hurrying delinquents who are asking about Mildred—Capt. Burnham and Mr. Sturges."

"Delighted!" said Sturges. "Do you know, Mrs. St. John, I've heard such a lot about you. Mildred and my sister, Winifred, are great chums, and I've known her—why, it's nine years. You wouldn't think that, now, would you?"

Mrs. St. John smiled at the enthusiastic young man, but before she could reply, Burnham was saying:

"I suppose it's too much to hope that you would remember me. It's so long since I met you and Miss St. John. It was at my first cadet hop, when Sturges and I were plebes."

"One does not forget some men, Capt. Burnham," Mrs. St. John began, diplomatically. But just then the music ceased, and Lafferty and the girl came up. Burnham turned quickly to the young woman, and extended his hand.

"You're a very long time redeeming your promise, Miss St. John," he said.

"My promise?" said the girl, questioningly.

"You remember Capt. Burnham, my dear," interrupted her mother.

"But I wasn't a captain when you made the promise, Miss St. John. If we had not both been so very young I should hesitate to tell you how long it has been since I was a plebe, and you were—well, I'll tell you what you were when Sturges is not by clamoring for a dance."

Sturges had been restraining with difficulty a very evident desire to monopolize conversation and the girl both, and now that Burnham gave him the chance, he said, eagerly:

"Make it the first you can, Mildred. I'm going to telegraph Win in the morning to find out why she didn't write me you were coming."

"She didn't know," said the girl. "We didn't know ourselves. We were planning to go South, and then Mrs. Barry's

letter came, and we changed our minds."

The music began again, and Sturges offered his arm to the girl. But Burnham interfered.

"Surely this must be mine, Miss St. John," he said. "Don't you think it has been promised long enough?"

The astonished lieutenant saw his captain whirl the girl away almost out of his arms, and swung on his heel to note the glowering gaze of Lafferty following the dancers. There had been the briefest greeting between the two officers. Lafferty had responded to Burnham's hearty "Hello" with only a cold nod. Now the expression of the older man as he watched Burnham and the girl suggested something to Sturges which made the ebullient lieutenant start and emit a long whistle. He glanced at his captain, and saw that accomplished officer devoting himself to his partner with an earnestness very unusual for "Lady" Burnham.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, and turned again to Mrs. Barry and the girl's mother.

"What do you mean by my old promise?" asked the girl, as she and Burnham swept away from the others.

"So deeply pledged, so soon forgotten!" answered Burnham. "Oh, fickle fate!"

"Or never remembered, which?" said the girl.

Burnham laughed softly, and replied, as if quoting the old promise:

"The first dance that comes the next time we meet. We were long in meeting again, but this is the first dance, and I did not forget."

His eyes met hers, and the girl's dropped under the steady gaze.

"I think you do," she said.

"Forget?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What?"

"Yourself."

"It's a great thing to make some men forget themselves," said Burnham, lightly. "There's Lafferty, for instance. I warrant he didn't."

The girl looked up at him quickly, puzzled, yet smiling.

"I'm not half sure whether I remember you or not," she said. "When was it?"

"When I was a plebe; oh, long, long ago, and you were a little girl."

"So very long ago?"

"Ah, yes; for me, who remembered. But, of course, not for you."

"Well, what have you remembered so many years since I was a girl that am now a haggard old spinster?"

Burnham's eyes dwelt again on the fair face, the soft light hair, the full throat, the curve of the rounded chin. She flushed warmly under his gaze, and he caught himself up sharply. Then he smiled, as he said:

"I was noting the wrinkles of haggard old age, the crow's feet, and the hollow cheeks."

"Dodged!" exclaimed the girl. "You don't remember anything."

"I remember every one of those nine dances," he protested, eagerly. "And the promise of the last one which is just now receiving fulfillment. And I remember, too, to ask another promise."

"Which is?"

"The next dance."

"How diplomatic!" she said, "when you heard it promised to Mr. Sturges."

The music ceased, and they turned toward Mrs. Barry's corner. Sturges came rapidly toward them.

"Jim," said Burnham, "I wish I were colonel for a few minutes. I'd detail you to special duty away from the post during the next dance."

"I wouldn't be king of England," retorted Sturges, "if I had to go on duty during the next half hour."

"Ah, well," said Burnham, "I've waited nine years for this dance; I can wait some more for the next, I suppose."

"More years?" asked the girl, laughingly, as she and Sturges moved away.

It was plain to all the post in a very few days that Lafferty and Burnham were hard hit by the girl who was visiting at the colonel's. Sturges' description of her as "stunning" was heartily accepted by all the men, and even the women admitted that she was "attract-

ive." Sturges championed the cause of his captain with a whole-souled vigor that might have embarrassed a less masterful man. Lafferty amazed the post. His old acerbity of manner was all gone. Even his troop felt the change. No one had suspected him of any such possibilities of amiability and good nature as he displayed now.

As for Burnham, he went his way, in his own frank, hearty manner, and no man could have told from look, or act, or word what he felt or thought. Between them the two men kept the girl's time well occupied. She was a fine horsewoman, and with one or other of the two captains she was the center of parties which scoured the country within range of the post.

There had been great preparations for the Christmas Eve hop. The old drill hall was decorated and trimmed as never before in its history. Stacks of green boughs had been brought from the scrub pines in the far-off foothills. The long room blazed with the light of hundreds of tall candles, and was gay with the bright colors of bunting and flags. Scores of Chinese lanterns swung from crossbeams and rafters. Burnham and Lafferty were both very prompt, and Lafferty with ill-concealed impatience hovered near the door awaiting the arrival of the colonel and his guests. At last they came, and there were brief nods of greeting before they disappeared into the dressing-room. Lafferty waited almost at the door, but Burnham stood, serenely, down the room, apparently deep in conversation with Maj. Huston. He saw the girl, however, as she left the dressing-room, and turned toward her just as Lafferty, with eager step, reached her side. Burnham left the major, and strolled carelessly toward the couple just in time to hear her say:

"I'm sorry, Capt. Lafferty, but I've promised that to Capt. Burnham."

"Damn Burnham!" cried Lafferty, his face all white in a flash. He could have bitten the tongue out of his mouth for it the next instant, but before he could utter a word, Burnham was asking, very sweetly:

"What were you saying, Capt. Lafferty?"

The men faced each other close together, and the girl saw murder in Lafferty's look. But Burnham was smiling, his clear eyes gazing coolly straight into Lafferty's. Then Burnham felt the girl's hand on his arm, and without waiting for Lafferty to speak he swung on his heel and walked away with her. Half down the room they went in silence, and then he leaned toward her.

"Are you sorry?" he asked, and his voice was so tense that it startled her.

"I hope I am at least polite," she replied; and Burnham was content, for surely Lafferty had not been.

Sturges saw Lafferty come straight down the room to the punch bowl, and read disaster in the ashen face and blazing eyes.

"One down!" he said, catching Thornton, who was passing, and nodding toward Lafferty.

Thornton glanced in the direction indicated, then with the same impulse both men turned to look for the girl. They found her talking to Burnham, and Sturges slapped Thornton on the shoulder with a whack which resounded through the room.

Lafferty's mask was down now, and he carried himself with a recklessness that made the colonel watch him with new anxiety. He had caught the look of surprise and distress that came into the girl's eyes when he cursed his rival, and right or wrong, had taken it on the spot for his dismissal. But now as he stood at the punch bowl, and thought it over, he made up his mind that he would prove yet that he was not so easily beaten. No friendly mirror was there to show him how haggard his thin face had grown, or to reveal the bloodshot streak in his savage eyes. He turned away, and sought through the room for the girl. No clear plan of action was in his mind, only the fierce impulse which drove him on in the desperate desire to speak to her again. The music throbbed through his brain, and the beat of the bass pulsed in his temples. The glare of the lights confused him, and made him appear uncertain. He did not no-

tice how others looked curiously at him as he moved up and down the hall, nor did he hear the exclamations that now and then followed him. Once or twice, when he stroked his burning temple, his hand was like ice. Once he stopped, and held both hands in front of him, watching to see if they trembled.

"Dead, cold sober," he said to himself, as he noticed how still he could hold them.

Then he turned to his search again. Half the room guessed for whom he was looking, and knew where she was. But Lafferty held to the beaten course around the hall and missed. At last, however, he found her, and with a smothered oath saw that she was with Burnham. Under the old unused gallery that ran along the north wall of the hall there was a space where the whirling dancers did not come, and there, in the comparative quiet, Burnham and the girl were sitting. Lafferty started toward them, and his walk was shaky and unsteady. Between him and the couple there was a stanchion which supported the gallery overhead. In the end of the gallery, just above Burnham and the girl, there had been heaped up a pile of old timbers and other stuff that had once been used in making a stage across that end of the drill hall when amateur theatricals were the popular amusement.

Lafferty had almost reached the stanchion that separated him from the girl. His hand was outstretched as if to steady himself by it, when some of the dancers, whirling around the corner, struck him full in the back. He staggered, slipped and went down, a sliding fall that threw his entire weight against the rickety old stanchion. With a creak and a groan it gave way, and the next second that end of the gallery collapsed, and the whole pile of timbers and old stage wreckage was brought down.

Instantly confusion filled the room, and to the blare of the band was added the clamor of voices and the rush of feet across the shaking floor. Then above the noise arose the commanding voice of Burnham, shouting:

"Halt! Stand still! Stop the music!"

With one impulse, the excited crowd obeyed. Then those who were nearest saw what had happened, and what was to be done. Quick as the collapse had been, Burnham had been quicker. As the floor of the old gallery sagged, he sprang up and interposed himself, calling to the girl to jump for her life. He saw her start, and then the mass struck him. Squarely on his strong shoulders he caught the weight, and for a second held it up. Then like a bull that has had the master stroke from the matador, he staggered, and sank slowly beneath it. As he went down he saw Lafferty lying, white-faced and still, with a beam across his body. It flashed on him that the added weight would crush the life out of his rival, and that thought gave him strength. On his knees and hands he fell, and the great weight rested on his powerful back. Something soft and clinging dropped over his head, and blinded his eyes. Now it was a question of endurance. Hardly an instant had passed since the collapse, but already it seemed an age to him, and with it all was a dreadful uncertainty about the girl. He found himself calling aloud:

"Mildred! Mildred! Are you safe?"

Suddenly the pungent smoke of burning cloth filled his nostrils and his eyes, and he felt the heat of flames about his head. He understood instantly what had happened. The blazing candles caught in the fall had fired the decorations that had lodged on his head. With a groan he realized his situation. Then there came the rush of feet again, and the voice of Sturges calling:

"Steady, Tom, old man! Only a second!"

Something thick and stifling was thrown over his head, and at the same moment the weight was lifted off his back. Then blackness!

When he awoke he was lying in his own bed; he knew by the feel of it, and the indefinable sense of home that was in the air. He put up his hand, and touched his head. A wide bandage swathed it, and covered his eyes. Some one moved in the room, and he turned

toward the sound. The movement hurt him, and a smothered groan escaped his lips.

"Don't move, old man!" he heard Sturges say. "You're all right!"

"What time is it, Jim?"

"Christmas morning."

"Did she get out, Jim?" he asked, and there was a tightening about the heart that caught his breath.

"Safe and sound," said Sturges, gladly, "right as a trivet. Not hurt a bit."

"Ah!" said Burnham, with a contented little sigh. "I remember now."

He lay quiet for a long time, and Sturges saw him fumbling with a little package that was strung on the gold chain about his neck. After a while he asked, abruptly:

"And Lafferty?"

"We got him out, too," answered Sturges. "But he's pretty badly smashed. It may retire him. Now you be good, and keep still."

For many minutes Burnham obeyed. They seemed to him like hours. Then suddenly a great fear swept over him, a fear that chilled his heart, and made the cold beads stand out on his face.

"Jim," he said, and there was that in his call which caught his friend by the heartstrings, "Jim, shall I be——?" His voice choked, and he could not finish, but Sturges understood. He came to the bedside, and took the outstretched hand.

"Not a bit of it, Tom," he said, cheerily. "Shafer says he thinks both eyes will be all right. But it's the bandage now, you know, for a few days, and mighty still. It was a bad burn."

He was interrupted by a light step at the door, and the voice of the girl saying:

"May I come in? Dr. Shafer let me come."

Sturges turned from his friend, and arose to meet her. But straight as if she did not see him the girl passed him by, and sat down beside the bed. One glance at her face was all, and Sturges closed the door softly from the outside. The last thing he saw was a slim, white hand touching the bandaged head.

For a long time Burnham lay quiet. He seemed not to understand. His hands played with the little packet on the chain where he carried the locket which held his mother's picture.

"Jim," he said at last, "who was it, Jim?"

The girl leaned toward the bed, and her hand touched his face.

"Jim has gone," she said, and her voice was hardly more than a whisper.

His big right hand stopped playing with the trinket, and caught the slim fingers that touched his cheek.

"You?" he said. "And you were not hurt?"

"Oh, not a bit!" she cried, and in spite of herself there was half a sob in her voice.

His hand went back to the trinket on the locket chain, and now it was revealed, a single gleaming diamond in a plain, old-fashioned setting.

"It was my grandmother's, Mildred," he said, "and then my mother's. I had hoped to offer it to you to-day, but now—I may be blind, and I——"

The slim, white fingers were placed gently across his mouth, and he ceased to speak. Then his hands were crossed on his breast. For a long time, it seemed, he lay thus. Then he felt her cheek against his own, and her hand touched his. As his strong fingers crossed over hers, he felt the ring in the place made sacred by immemorial custom.

"Can you tell, dear?" she whispered. "It's as if it were made for me."



A GLIMPSE AT THE THEATRES

By Acton Davies

TO the mind of the average New York playgoer the moment the play has ended its run on Broadway its career is finished. To the mind of the average theatrical manager, intent upon swelling his box-office receipts, its career at that moment has only just begun. Outside of the exceptional successes, the plays which in the course of the season earn any large amount of money on Broadway can be numbered on the fingers of your two hands. A Broadway engagement may produce no end of laurel leaves, but laurel leaves in the theatrical market come high. It takes a long time and no end of barnstorming experiences to bring the balance back to the right side of the ledger again. Already the plays which opened in New York during August and early September are beginning to take wing to the provinces; the more pretentious productions of the later season are crowding them off Broadway. It's a singularly queer hodge-podge of success and mediocrity which the young season is scattering throughout the country. There have been genuine successes—not many, but two or three—and these plays are the ones which the country at large will have to wait for. New York hates to part with a real success. Cruel and captious as New York audiences may be in their judgment of mediocre attractions, there is no city where a real success receives the hall-mark of approval with such alacrity. This year this hall-mark has been stamped on very few plays. There have been many more productions than usual, but rarely, if ever, has the average of merit in these plays reached a lower ebb or been

marked by a more flippant and mediocre trend.

As has been the case for the past three years, the percentage of musical productions has been unprecedentedly high in quantity and particularly low in quality. I doubt if ever before New York audiences have had to sit through so much musical slush with horseplay, broken English and Tenderloin vulgarity as its principal ingredients. But let the bad work go on. This sort of production is bound to kill itself. The advent of a single such dainty and fragrant musical comedy as the "Three Little Maids" from London is calculated to sicken the public's taste for the average American musical show, as we are doomed to know it to-day, far quicker than the anathemas of all the critics combined. It is a cheerful fact, and one well worth noting, that this same "Three Little Maids" at Daly's has proved the most conspicuous success of the season. It deserves its success, for New York has never seen a more dainty, refined and irresistible performance. There have been many musical comedies mounted in greater splendor; but few, if any, in which the performance of the entire cast has reached a higher average of merit. In the realm of musical comedy America has still to raise her hat to "dear old London." Manager George Edwardes stands so far ahead of any American producer in this line of work that there is no one with whom we can compare him on this side of the water. In extravaganzas, such as "The Wizard of Oz," and some of the Weber and Fields' performances we can easily give London cards and spades; but in musical comedy we have still a great

deal to learn from the producers across the herring pond. Of course one of the great reasons of the rather extraordinary success of "Three Little Maids" is the inimitable performance of Mr. George Huntley as a new type of London Johnny; the man is a whole play in himself. As for the three young women, Miss Madge Crichton, Miss Maggie May and Miss Della Mason, who play the title rôles, their work both in song and dialogue is marked by an archness and grace which is completely captivating. Each of them has her own little specialty, and does it uncommonly well; but of course Miss May's rendering of "She Was the Miller's Daughter" is the most effective feature of the performance. This little song has enjoyed quite as remarkable a success in New York as it did in London when it first came out two years ago. It's as infectious as the measles, and it lasts even longer. Mr. Maurice Farkoa, a singer who won his spurs here several years ago in other Gaiety pieces, returns in this cast a finer artist than ever, and Mr. Edward Frazer, a *jeune premier* of the company, has both distinction and a capital voice. This is one of the pieces which it is absolutely safe to take your grandmother to.

The season opened on August seventeenth, at the Garrick, with a play of which perhaps the least said the better. It was entitled "Vivian's Papas," and Mr. Leo Ditrichstein was responsible for it. He has broad shoulders, so we will let it go at that. The principal players in this mass of unmitigated vulgarity were Miss Hattie Williams, Mr. John C. Rice and Mr. Thomas Wise.

The next production was a much more cheerful affair. It came at the Madison Square a week later, when Mr. Edwin Milton Royle produced his farce "My Wife's Husbands," with himself and his wife, Selina Fetter, in the principal rôles. The success of this jolly little play was instantaneous and complete. In Mr. and Mrs. Royle it brought back to Broadway two admirable comedians who for years have been lost in vaudeville, and now "they'll

never go there any more." The play itself has rather a curious history. It was written originally by Mr. Royle for Miss May Irwin, who at that time was threatening to retire from the stage unless some ambitious playwright rushed into the breach and wrote a play that was worthy of her. After reading "My Wife's Husbands," Miss Irwin decided it was a very good play indeed, but Mr. Royle's demands for royalties appalled her. She offered him two hundred and fifty dollars a week for the use of the play and his own services as leading man, but it happened that Mr. Royle has been acting in vaudeville, where, for a thirty-minute sketch, he could earn double that amount each week. Miss Irwin relinquished the play, and Mr. Royle carried it post-haste to Mr. William Collier, who at that time was contemplating a starring tour under the management of Weber and Fields.

Mr. Collier, usually an astute young man, could not see this play with a telescope; he preferred, and chose, a piece called "Personal," which, after a short and somewhat tempestuous career at the Bijou, has now gone to an unhallowed grave. The Royles continued to play "My Wife's Husbands" at the Madison Square, until Grace George, in "Pretty Peggy," came in to resume her last season's successful run.

"The Princess of Kensington," a comic opera by Basil Hood and Edward German, opened the season at the Broadway. It had a charming score, and Miss Dora de Felippe, a sister of Stephen Phillips, the English poet, scored in one of the principal rôles, but evidently Broadway audiences were not in the mood just then for old-fashioned comic opera. James T. Powers, the star, worked manfully to bring the play to the haven of success, but it failed to draw as well as had been expected, and in a few weeks' time was succeeded by Mr. Orrin Johnson in a dramatized novel, "Hearts Courageous." It would be hard to prove Mr. Johnson's claims to stardom even by geometry. He is a pleasant young actor, lacking in repose and distinction, and seemed, at the

first performance, rather embarrassed by the fierce white light of the calcium which shone upon him consecutively as befits a new-laid star. The play, although admirably mounted, is merely "one of those things."

Mrs. Langtry, looking at least a decade younger than on her last appearance here a year ago in "The Crossways," opened the season at the Savoy, in a rattling little comedy by Percy Fendal, "Mrs. Deering's Divorce." It carried the Lily through a successful season here, and sent her on the road to gather shekels with a first-rate New York indorsement. It was easily the best stage vehicle which Mrs. Langtry has had in years, and she was capitally supported by a company which included Paul Arthur, Crayley Douglas and Ina Goldsmith. After Mrs. Langtry, at the Savoy, came—not the deluge, but—that was infinitely worse—"The Spenders." Mr. W. H. Crane was starring in it, and to say that it was a weird production is putting it mildly; I might almost say, charitably. Never has an actor of the first rank appeared in New York surrounded by a company of more complete incompetents. Of play, there was not a trace. Mr. Harry Leon Wilson's brilliant story had been so massacred by the little hatchet of Mr. E. E. Rose that you could scarcely honor the remnants by calling them even a farcical hash. Mr. Crane, looking very unhappy in the midst of the bewildering mass of incompetency, gave a very faithful and lifelike performance of Mr. Crane. He puffed out his cheeks, stuck his fingers in the armpits of his waistcoat, and smiled genially, just as he has been known to on occasion in real life. He was supposed to be playing the rôle of *Peter Bines*, a sterling Western miner, but what puzzled the audience most was how and where he had acquired a grandson of such pronounced Hebraic features as the hero was. There have been many phony leading men sprung on the long-suffering New York public in the last few years, but this young Mr. Spencer reached the limit. At the end of the first performance, Mr. Crane,

in a semi-apology before the curtain, said that he had tried the play on several out-of-town audiences, but "the dog" in every case had refused to bark at it. This certainly showed rare discrimination on the canine's part, for a single bite at the manuscript of "The Spenders" would be calculated to give any well-regulated dog the rabies.

At the Fourteenth Street, there was a Boucicault revival which was one of the most interesting features of the new season. The famous old dramatist's "Arrah na Pogue," which had not been acted in New York for nearly a quarter of a century, was revamped with great success by Mr. Andrew Mack. In the character of *Shawn*, Mr. Mack gave the most artistic performance of his career, and he was supported ably by Miss Edith Barker, who made a very lovely *Arrah*, and Mr. Luke Martin, whose sketch of *Michael Feeny* the process-server was inimitable. In one scene Mr. Mack sang "The Wearing of the Green" with so much feeling that the Dutch policeman at the back of the theatre had to be carried out in tears every night. Thus do great nations assimilate!

The Rogers Brothers took possession of the beautiful Knickerbocker, and filled it for a considerable time with their usual din and horseplay. Gauged by their own standard—and in their particular line there is no other by which they could be gauged—the show which they offer this season is a little less bright in all save its color effects, and a good deal more vulgar even than usual. It was, in fact, merely a repetition and rehash of all their other shows of the past few years.

"Peggy from Paris" was another of the musical plays which failed to arouse any particular enthusiasm. It was hard to realize that the book of this *mélange* had been written by the same man who wrote "The Sultan of Sulu"—one George Ade. Mr. Ade has confessed to his friends that he is so ashamed of this latest unmasterwork of his, that he has condemned himself to be embalmed in his next new fable, where it is to be hoped he may point a moral even if he

does not adorn the tale. There were one or two clever musical numbers, and a young person, Miss Helen Hale, who seemed to be composed of equal parts of india rubber and assurance, kept her toes in midair for a large part of the evening. There were also many elaborate costumes, which clashed terrifically when they came together, and raised a chromatic clamor that could be heard without a megaphone.

On the same Monday night came a great surprise and a bitter disappointment. Charles Warner, the English actor, scored a sensational success in "Drink," at the Academy of Music, and the much-vaunted Beerholm Tree production of Stephen Phillips' "Ulysses" came a cropper at the Garden. I speak of Mr. Warner's success merely as a surprise, because for the past ten years American managers without an exception have been assuring him that great as his performance of *Coupeau* was in "Drink," he could never expect to score in America in so old-fashioned and trite a play. Last winter Mr. Warner paid his first visit to this country, and spent four months in endeavoring to persuade some manager to put him on for, if necessary, a single performance. His effort was fruitless, and during his visit here Mr. Warner enjoyed the felicity of seeing one of his greatest successes, "At the Telephone," botched and butchered at a New York theatre. At one time he was on the point of accepting a week's engagement with the Murray Hill Stock Company at popular prices, but his friends persuaded him that as an introduction for an artist of his standing this would prove a suicidal move. Finally, Mr. William Harris, who had seen Mr. Warner play "Drink" many years ago in England, took the leap. He engaged Mr. Warner to appear here this season. The result is that he now has on his hands one of the most profitable stars that has ever come out of England. The success which Mr. Warner scored on his first performance at the Academy may well be described as electrical. The gods took him to their heart instantaneously, and in the auditorium there was the

very unusual sight of men and women so far forgetting their own dignity as to stand up and cheer the actor again and again. His *Coupeau* is probably the most harrowing performance that was ever shown upon the stage. As a character study it is a tremendous achievement, one which stands entirely by itself. One rather curious evidence of the hold which Mr. Warner has gained upon the New York public is the crowd, not a few mere curious stragglers, but a mob of from three to five hundred people, which flocks to the stage door every night to see Mr. Warner make his exit. In other cities where stars, be they great or small from an artistic standpoint, rank as rarer birds than they do in the metropolis, this sight is more common; but it is only once in a blue moon and on the appearance of some great favorite that so many enthusiastic rubber-necks can be found in waiting at a New York stage door. The fact that Mr. Warner has been playing this rôle of *Coupeau* for a quarter of a century in England has not abated the exuberance and gusto with which he plays the part in the smallest degree. Though he has been on the stage a good many years longer than Sir Henry Irving, he looks young enough to-day to easily pass as Sir Henry's son. "Drink" may have been intended originally to teach a great moral lesson, but a census taken of the barrooms in the vicinity of the Academy shows that never in the history of that venerable edifice has the demand for hard liquor been so incessant and consecutive as it is now during the *entre acts* of Mr. Warner's play. Temperance lecturers would do well to look into this matter; the subject might even interest the W. C. T. U.

And now as to "Ulysses." Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen! The play as a dramatic poem has already taken its place in English literature. The production, substantial, accurate and picturesque in all its scenic accessories, had been forwarded intact from His Majesty's Theatre, London, where Mr. Tree had originally produced it. Mr. Charles Frohman, the American

producer of the play, had engaged five good actors for the leading rôles, namely: Miss Rose Coghlan, whose performance of *Penelope* was the one glowing and majestic achievement of the night; Miss Adelaide Prince, a charming *Pallas Athene*; Miss Olive Oliver, a bewitching *Calypso*; Mr. Fuller Mellish, capital as the *swainherd*, and Mr. Tyrone Power, whose performance of *Ulysses* fell a long way short of what had been expected of him. The rest was silence, or, rather, just the opposite. The shrieks, and wails, and yells of the supernumeraries when enacting gods or disporting themselves as spirits in the depths of hades were so ludicrous and mirth-provoking that they turned some of the most effective scenes of the poem-drama into screaming farce. But the supernumeraries were not alone in dealing out death and destruction to Mr. Phillips' creation. The minor characters mouthed and mangled their lines to such an extent that many of the most beautiful speeches were entirely lost. Rarely has so fine a play received such chary and careless treatment. The stage manager had not even taken the trouble to make the subordinate actors pronounce the names of the characters correctly. With the exception of Miss Coghlan and Miss Oliver, all the actors persisted in addressing Miss Prince as *Palace Athenay*. Mr. Power was burly, and big, and painstaking. At times he looked like an Irish comedian, but then that was not his fault. As a matter of fact, he was cast out of his line. He is a character actor before all else, and if he is wise henceforth he will leave the rôle of leading man to handsomer, if not wiser, actors. His performance of *Ulysses* makes a lamentable anti-climax to his *Judas Iscariot* in "Mary of Magdala" last year. It was a genuine delight, however, to see Miss Coghlan back in New York again in a rôle which was so worthy of her splendid art. They don't seem to be turning out any young Rose Coghlan in these days, and for the matter of that you may look in vain through the ranks of leading men for any young actor who can ever hope to

approach the brilliant acting of her late Brother Charles.

John Drew, another of the fairly mature leading men who can still hold his own against all comers, has not been as fortunate as usual in his choice of a play this year. "Captain Dieppe," in which he appeared, is slim to the point of slenderness in the matter of plot. It will never need to bant. It shows Mr. Drew, however, in a fairly facetious and fascinating character. To play a rôle of this sort must by this time have become second nature to him; he could act it almost in his sleep. The dialogue in many of its scenes is clever. The story is not only slight, but quite impossible, and if you come to analyze the character of the hero at all closely you will find that the authors, Anthony Hope and Harrison Rhodes, have made him rather a cad. Like Mr. Crane's and the "Ulysses" company, Mr. Drew's cast suffers this year from the prevalent plague of bad actors. Miss Margaret Dale, Miss Allison Skipworth and Mr. Sidney Herbert are the only members of it who merit any serious consideration as artists. The balance of the company might be aggregated under the head of lumber, they are certainly a lot of sticks.

Charles Hawtrey, on the other hand, has brought over this year an exceptionally clever London company. He needed them, for in "The Man From Blankley's," clever and original as this little play of F. Anstey's is, his own chances for distinction are very little above those usually given to the average walking gentleman. At the same time, Mr. Hawtrey invests this part with so much charm that he makes it stand out prominently, small as it is. Fanny Brough, a deliciously droll comédienne, as *Mrs. Tidmarsh*, the cockney hostess who gives the dinner party, which makes all the trouble, is really the life and soul of the piece. She receives able assistance from Mr. Fred Thorne, Mr. Henry Kemble and half a dozen minor actors, each of whom contributes a capital bit of eccentric comedy. "The Man From Blankley's" would be well worth seeing even if it

were only on account of its being so different from the average English farce. The idea, of course, is a purely English one. Blankley's is a place where they hire out well-dressed guests at a guinea a night to fill the vacant chairs left at a dinner party by any old sort of emergency. On the night of her dinner, *Mrs. Tidmarsh* finds to her horror that they are going to sit down thirteen at table, so she sends her husband off at a frantic pace to hire a guest from Blankley's. He is to be sent down with the governess, and *Mrs. Tidmarsh* guarantees to keep a weather eye on both him and the plate. A young nobleman who is booked to dine next door, with a family whom he has never seen, strays into the *Tidmarsh's* house by mistake. Of course he is mistaken for the man from Blankley's. The governess whom he has to take down to dinner turns out to be an old, old friend. The play, after innumerable complications, ends with a promise of wedding cake. In the hands of any ordinary company the thread of this farce is so slight that it would inevitably go to pieces. But Mr. Hawtrey's players at the Criterion keep it at just the proper *tempo*.

The American is one of the theatres which has been lucky enough to strike a genuine success at the outset of its season. "Checkers," a dramatization of Henry M. Blossom, Jr.'s, delightful, little story, is one of the few book-plays which does credit to its original source. It is one of those plays which will appeal to every class of audience. It can win its way on Broadway quite as easily as it has on Eighth Avenue. It tells a droll and tender little story, and has just enough devilry in it to appeal to the average boy. It brings forward a new young actor, Thomas Ross, who is by far the cleverest of all the would-be stars of this or last season. He reminds you very forcibly of Nat Goodwin in his heyday, when Shakespeare had not overtaken him like a pall and he wasn't ashamed to be seen playing in a farce. Like Mr. Goodwin, too, he can strike a pathetic note in the very midst of his laughter. As *Checkers*, he gives a per-

formance which is winsome, manly and droll. In David Braham, Jr., and Miss May Vokes, he has two able coadjutors. The scene in the betting ring at Washington Park, Chicago, on Derby day, is by far the best representation of a race course which the stage has shown. In "Checkers" it begins to look as though Manager Kirke La Shelle had almost as big a gold mine as in his other great success, "The Earl of Pawtucket."

From a spectacular standpoint "Whoop-Dee-Doo," the new Weber and Fields' show, and "Babes in Toyland" at the Majestic, are vying for honor. The one under the stage management of Ben Teale achieves remarkable scenic effects on a tiny stage, and the latter as produced by Julian Mitchell sets a new limit in stage pageantry. In "Babes in Toyland," Mr. Mitchell has easily excelled the wildest and most dazzling scenes of Drury Lane pantomimes. In addition he has brought to bear on his capably trained chorus an amount of good generalship, which gives the marches and musical numbers a degree of alacrity and ginger which you cannot find in the London productions. The "Babes in Toyland" will never be as funny an extravaganza as its predecessor, "The Wizard of Oz," but in both its spectacular features and its novelty it sets a pace which other aspiring managers in this line of work are going to find it hard to follow. The chief newcomer at the Weber and Fields' fun factory is Louis Mann. He won his spurs at the first performance. The cleverest skit in the new burlesque is a take-off on that most prevalent nuisance in musical comedy, the show girl. Weber and Fields, Peter Dailey, John T. Kelly and Louis Mann participate in it. This skit is not only side-splitting, but it hits a very necessary nail on the head. The chorus girl is a very necessary and hard-working citizeness. She earns her salary, and in nine cases out of ten she is invariably good to her mother. The show girl, as a rule, can neither sing nor dance. She is a strutter both on and off the stage. If it was not for their beauty, these young women would long ago have

been relegated to the back row of the chorus. The Floradora Sextette started this craze, and there is no telling where it is going to end. This skit at Weber and Fields' will go far toward putting show girls in their proper place.

In his new play, "Her Own Way," Clyde Fitch has in a great measure redeemed himself for some of his fiascos of last year. Not only has he supplied Miss Maxine Elliott with a capital stage vehicle, but he has written a comedy which contains more genuine worth and cleverness than anything that he has written since "The Climbers." It lacks the strength of the other play, but it tells none the less a very sweet and charming story with a whole lot of youngsters in it to lighten the atmosphere of the first two acts. This piece throughout is uncommonly well acted. Mr. Fitch is one of the playwrights who is sufficiently wise and influential to insist upon choosing actors who shall play his parts. The result is that in all the Fitch plays, no matter how poor or hastily written they may prove to be, the casting of the play is almost invariably above reproach. Miss Elliott's success in "Her Own Way" has proved so pronounced that she need not begrudge the success which two other women in her cast have scored. I refer to Miss Nellie Thorne and Miss Georgia Lawrence. The former scored in an emotional scene, while the latter proved quite inimitable as a tough and talkative little East Side hairdresser. While Miss Elliott has been growing thinner physically, as an actress she has unquestionably matured. The day when she was to be regarded purely as a beauty has gone by. Mr. Nat Goodwin must look to his laurels, or they will be rechristening him Mr. Maxine Elliott, and it is one of this fine actor's peculiarities that he never likes to be called out of his name.

Mrs. Fiske's production of Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler," put on for a single week to bring her engagement at the Manhattan to a close, proved to the

surprise of many not only an artistic achievement, but a big financial success. Unless I am very much mistaken, this is the first time that an Ibsen play has ever made a dollar in New York. Of course, I don't speak now of occasional performances where tickets have been bought by subscription and that sort of thing. But in the case of Mrs. Fiske's experiment the public seemed genuinely anxious to see both this great play and Mrs. Fiske and her company's fine performance of it. It is some years since she has had a character which suited her temperament and talent so well. In one respect only was her performance a disappointment. She failed to rise to the one emotional climax of the play. Perhaps Mrs. Fiske argues that Ibsen is an advocate of repressed action; but there comes a time when repression can no further go, and emotion, passion or just common or garden hysterics becomes the natural outcome of a situation. That Mrs. Fiske missed her one great chance for emotional work is the more to be regretted on account of the brilliancy and intensity of the rest of her performance. In two instances she received most admirable support. Miss Carlotta Nilson gave a remarkably tender and sympathetic performance of *Hedda's* rival, and Mr. William Mack, as *Hedda's* husband, proved himself an actor of most natural method. The play is morbid, harrowing, revolting, if you will; but, after all, it is a play. And in these days that counts for so much. Indeed, how scarce real plays are, and how eager the public is to see them has never been more forcibly demonstrated than in the revival, after its phenomenal run of last year, of David Belasco's "The Darling of the Gods." As far as the size of its audiences are concerned, it might still be in the first flush of its success. So far, the new season has brought it no rival, and it could easily remain at the home theatre playing to crowded houses until Mr. Belasco's new drama is ready for production at Christmas time.

FOR BOOK LOVERS

"SHE That Hesitates," by Harris Dickson, Bobbs-Merrill Company, the publishers, is a tale of love and adventure, the scene laid in Russia and the characters taking part in a well-woven and intensely dramatic plot.

There is a typical Russian *intrigante*, beautiful and dangerous, a fascinating character that dominates the story from beginning to end. Charlotte, the heroine, is more feminine and in her love for D'Aubant is charmingly inconsistent. Although her love causes her to take risks in the way of arranging meetings with the hero, his unusual nobility of character and her own sudden reactions from girlish passion to womanly virtue bring her triumphantly through several tumultuous crises that are undeniably compromising.

After many days of unhappy married life and widowhood, she comes to the waiting arms of D'Aubant, who has fancied her dead. The reader cannot help feeling glad that this noble chap is rewarded. Men like him are so rare that one would not look for them outside a museum or a wax-work exhibition.

That unpleasant part of the Russian wedding ceremony which calls for the whipping of the bride with the "bridegroom's whip," is powerfully pictured and will please those who like shudders in theirs.

"A Child's Letters to Her Husband," by Helen Watterson Moody, published by Doubleday, Page & Company, is a deliciously unconventional volume made up of missives written by an imaginative little girl to her imaginary husband. She christens him "Prince Cherri-val," and tells him the details of her

life at home with father, uncles and aunts, but without a mother, which lack in her life is made pathetically plain by the writer, although the child is made to seem unconscious of it.

Her joys and sorrows, as well as her sins, are all set down without any adornment, and her quaint views of life and people are a never-failing source of interest and mirth to the reader, who gets quite well acquainted with Virginia. She seems a very real little girl.



That remarkable young woman, Mary MacLane, has evolved another remarkable book, "Annabel Lee," which Stone, of Chicago, publishes. It is a collection of conversations and introspections which the writer carries on with the aid of a Japanese doll, for whom the book is named.

Fanciful in the extreme and self-conscious as these pages are, there is the same youthful originality in them that marked the previous weird bit of literature that made the Montana girl known. There is also the same habit of repetition in the phrasing and a philosophy that mystifies as to its meaning and conveys the impression at times that the writer only half knows what she is trying to express.

But there is no gainsaying the oddness of the sketches and the occasional bits of misty poetry that are dreamy, fascinating and feminine. The MacLane humor is uncanny, but she has ceased to be profane and to repine over the sameness of toothbrushes.



Guy Wetmore Carryl, whose Gilbertian manner of making rhymes proves him

master of the mechanics of verse, has written some charming short stories, published by Houghton, Mifflin & Company, which book is called "Zut," that expressive bit of French slang, in this case the name of a white Angora cat.

All the stories are located in Paris, where this writer lived for several years, and the atmosphere that pervades the tales proves that he has investigated the life of the studios, the shops and the restaurants rather than the *saloons*. The odor of Paris and spring, "the wet wood pavements and horse-chestnut blossoms," comes up from the pages and carries you to the Boulevards and the Bois as you read.



George Ade, the artist in slang and librettist in ordinary, has joined the ranks of the slangless in his book, "In Babel," published by McClure, Phillips & Company. He presents a number of sketches dealing with life in Chicago.

They were printed originally as daily contributions to the Chicago *Record-Herald*, and have the journalistic ease and unstudied style which are this author's chief distinctions.

Boyishness and life mark the sketches. "Dudley '89" is filled with college fun, and "The Buell Cherry" is, as they say at teas, "perfectly lovely."

Mr. Ade may not always be edifying or enlightening, but he sees things with his own eyes, which are keen to the foolishness and smallness of humanity. He never tires you, and his pen, you feel, is yet to show its best prowess.



E. Nesbit's story, "The Red House," made a place for her in conservative libraries. Her collection of short stories, "The Literary Sense," put forth by the Macmillan Company, is a book less happy in its mood, but nevertheless unique in the author's utilization of the literary sense as a factor in the scheme of existence.

After a first success, authors are sometimes tempted to root into their

desks for previous material that may have passed without particular notice, and the result is confusing to the conscientious reader who looks for the same quality or better than that of the book that has struck the first note of success.

But these stories are deft in their little plots, and have tears and smiles and love and laughter in them if they lack the sweet lavender-scented sentimentality of "The Red House."



"Letters Home" is a Harper book by William Dean Howells. The letters are sent from New York by a group of non-New Yorkers, and despite their realistic author, they are as unreal as most book correspondence is. They are lengthy, literary, well-written missives, and tell an interesting story.

The book is in the familiar Howells manner, unconsciously educative and at times consciously irritating through the unnatural correctness of the moods, manners and morals of its people.



The woman who writes on household topics, the cooking of new dishes, the hygiene of the home, the *menus* for different days in the week, the driving out of ants and water-bugs, invariably knows more of her subject than of the power to impart it entertainingly in books.

This it is that makes our gastronomic literature so deadly, as a general thing. Years ago the late Thomas Murrey wrote a series of entertaining little booklets, in which personalities, anecdotes and the natural gifts of the *raconteur* were well in evidence.

But as a rule we are confronted by a stone wall of hard facts, and rudely and peremptorily commanded to "take six fresh eggs," or "select a fine female lobster," the awful author apparently taking for granted our possession of an almost clairaudient discrimination.

Emily Holt has written an "Encyclopedia of Household Economy," which

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McClure publishes, the book dealing with affairs of the home and touching on everything from sanitary plumbing to the care of canaries. It is a valuable volume for those who take their house-keeping seriously.

If these women, so splendidly equipped with a knowledge of domestic science, could only cultivate a more lightsome style, or, if one may say, a less sordid view of the subject in hand, it would inspire more young women with a desire to be faddy on the subject of home making. Gastronomy, furnishing, the feasting of friends and the choosing of palatable dishes, are really æsthetic arts, and if given that atmosphere in their recital would prove vastly interesting.

As it is, even our best cook books are bound in washable oilcloth, a suggestion that my lady makes her *pâtés* with the volume outspread before her like a music score. Why not a book for the library or the boudoir for study and inspiration—for education on the most neglected of all the arts.



"The Yellow Crayon" is a well-told story of The Primrose League, a secret society which bound the nobility of the world in opposition to anarchy and socialism. E. Phillips Oppenheim is the author, and Dodd, Mead & Company the publishers.

Women as well as men were among the members of this order, and were under oath to obey to the letter any command written in yellow crayon. Lucile, Countess of Radantz, the wife of the Duke of Souspennier, who masquerades as Mr. Sabin, figures brilliantly in adventures that made her life lively in the extreme.

His Grace, the Duke, might have been an American, so cool, imperturbable and successful was he in frustrating the plans against him and defeating the plots that were made to steal his lovely wife. He turns up always at the right moment, like a veritable Hawkshaw, and can order a dinner to perfection, even when the air around him is sizzling with danger.

In fact, Sabin is as picturesque a modern as we have had in a book for moons. His manner of dealing with crises is so splendid and his love for his young wife, reciprocated by her in spite of his limp, make him an unusual hero.

Mr. Oppenheim is to be congratulated on his courage. Few authors would be so daring as to give us a hero with a lame leg.



"A Parish of Two," by Henry Goeltz McVickar and Price Collier, Lothrop Publishing Company, is once more a collection of letters; not literary letters this time, but virile human documents between two men—one a minister, disabled and condemned to an invalid chair, from which he writes to his friend, a man of exuberant animal moods, combined with an appreciation of the beautiful and an ability to write rarely interesting letters imbued with vitality.

If men only wrote letters such as this nowadays women would prefer to have their courtships entirely epistolary. The worldly man is a delightfully frank sinner, and makes his confessions daringly with a tobacco sauce of epigram which, in books, always makes sin seem like temperamental erraticism rather than a pitfall.

He falls in love with the wife of another man, an alluring creature who changes him from a "sodden lump of clay into a conductor of electricity—from a pumpkin into a man."

She must be a remarkable young woman, as he describes her. "It is a case," he writes, "of the marriage of innate goodness to intellect, with the one child, Beauty, as a result. Here beauty is the visible expression of herself; it is logical and therefore convincing. Where she is, the air is charged with electricity; you inhale new life, your dead ambitions rise from their graves and are born again. Your sympathies for others, atrophied for years, become strong and lusty once more, and seek a practical outlet. Of course, this

atmosphere seems good to me, and I drink it in with long, deep breaths,—

"For when the sun is hot as fire
And sky one burning soft sapphire
One doesn't drink in little sips."

The fact that this electrically-charged young man is married to another woman, "who uses his mouth as a doormat on which to wipe her lips," doesn't seem to matter very much; but he is punished for this in the end by losing the electric girl.

Her brute of a husband dies, and so does the minister. The picturesque sinner goes back presumably to make epigrams for the wife who has the doormat habit. But the book is one of those few fascinating ones that hold you in a spell, and you wish that men wrote that way to-day, instead of telephoning or wiring messages intended to conceal their thoughts.



"Earth's Enigmas" is another collection of Charles G. D. Roberts' capital short stories, published by Page, of Boston. Charles Livingston Bull's posterisque pictures illumine the well-printed pages.

"In the Accident Ward" is a vivid dream on an operating-table just as the patient is coming back to consciousness. "The Hill of Chastisement" is also a transcript of a dream.

Mr. Roberts' interpretations of the mysteries of dreamland are as fascinating as his studies of animal psychology. He is a poet, and the poetic quality is in strong evidence in all he writes, even to a certain rhythmic swing that runs like music through all his prose pages.



There is the plash of oars on the Grand Canal, moonlight and the song of a gondolier in Clinton Scollard's "Count Falcon of the Eyrie," published by James Pott & Company, New York.

This is a romance of Italy with the fires of feud and passion ablaze through all its stirring developments. The

scenes are placed in splendid Venice and in Rome. There is music and love and the clash of swords throughout, and a charming bit of typical Scollard verse ends the book, a sentry's song:

"Love, ere the last of the red roses falls
And winter whines about the castle walls
Crown thou my life with rapture! Let me know
An end of waiting and an end of woe
Love, ere the last of the red roses falls!"



A. S. Barnes & Company are publishers of "His Little World," by Samuel Merwin. It is the story of Hunch Badeau, captain of a schooner plying on the Great Lakes. It is a tale of rough people simply told, and Hunch is the hero, also rough and simple, but big-hearted.

The girl-woman of the book is a colorless little creature who, however, manages to hold love and life and death in her hand, and in the end Hunch Badeau wins her as proudly as though she were an unreal princess of historic fiction.



Appleton publishes Arthur Stringer's much-talked-of "A Silver Poppy." It is a good story of workaday Bohemia in New York, and the hero, an Englishman, is an unusually fine specimen of the writing fraternity.

The woman in the book gains false fame through a stolen manuscript, which she palms off on the public as her own, and it meets with such unexpected success that she wins immediate distinction in the literary world. She follows up her first theft by enlisting the services of the Englishman, who, under her spell, becomes her devoted servant and spends his time rewriting a story of hers, written to follow the first. She appropriates the fame of this also.

She is a literary vampire, yet, like some of Ibsen's perverted women, she is not repellent. The story that has gone about and that still advertises the book is probably a romance of the stu-

dios. It is said that the character of the woman is drawn from that of a certain well-advertised writer who had won pecuniary success in a few years through her shrewd methods of keeping before the public.

This can hardly be true. So clever a writer as the author of this book would hardly stoop to such a contemptible form of literary revenge. At all events, whether love or hate inspired it, it is an absorbing tale, never dull, often scintillant, and it is delightfully modern. The Colonial, Revolutionary, Puritan and Civil War periods are depressingly frequent as themes of novels.



"The Maids of Paradise," by Robert Chambers, published by Harper's, and illustrated by André Castaigne, is as virile, romantic and as filled with flesh-and-blood adventure as Mr. Chambers' previous books have been. There is never a moment from beginning to end of this volume when the interest flags. For this is a tale of war as well as love, and swords clash and shells break through the chapters with a hearty realism that is quite different from the usual war story. Chambers has the art of writing of battle, and using words so that one feels the very hiss of the bullets in the air, the flourish of the lance and the call of the trumpet. Yet he escapes as though by magic the theatric note.



Quite another sort of a book is one in a dressy blue cover, somewhat egotistically named "Gold From Life's Rainbows, Short Stories and Sweet Songs." The author, who is disclosed on the frontispiece wearing a butterfly bow and clutching a pen and a manuscript in one hand, is James Hampton Lee, and the Broadway Publishing Company is responsible for the coming-out of the volume.

There are sketches undeniably short and verses which are not what we should call sweet. We have needed a sweet

singer, but Mr. Lee does not strike twelve in this collection.

There is one song called "A Pair of Purple Slippers," of which the less said the better. Then there is "The Hallowed Hammock." Oh, very well! One of Mr. Lee's striking, almost startlingly erotic, verses reads:

"He sees, too, her fawn-like slippered feet
And her ankles trim, dainty and dapper.
The outline of her limbs complete
Beneath her gorgeous wrapper!"

"As You Down the Hudson Glide" is a nifty piece of lyric craft. Not so snappy as the other; but—

"Down the grand old Hudson coming,
With your girl at night it's grand
When the humming-birds are humming;
When you hold her little hand
Oh, for more of such excursions
Up historic Hudson stream;
More of such unique diversions
When things are just what they seem!"

There is nothing of life's rainbows about this sky-blue book. Not even fair to cloudy!



"Marriage in Epigram" is an amusing little book of quotations relating to love and marriage. It is compiled by Frederick W. Morton, and published by A. C. McClurg & Company, of Chicago. Among the authors whom the compiler uses most frequently as authorities on this subject are Socrates, Ovid, Marion Harland, Saint Paul and Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, and which offers a scope wide and almost as deep as a subway excavation.



"Parsifal," a dream by Wagner, as retold by Oliver Huckel, is published by Thomas P. Crowell & Company. There are five illustrations by Franz Stassen. This English translation of Wagner's great poem will delight those who have studied the spiritual *motif* of the beautiful musical legend that we have hitherto known best through Tennyson and Abbey, who in poem and picture have endeavored to convey the mystery of the Wagnerian masterpiece.